

THE KING'S SIGNET

Remploy

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

STRANGE VISITORS

AN August morning.

Down the broad oak stairway of Grangeland Abbey tripped a girl of some nine or ten years, slim, with small, aristocratic features, violet-blue eyes, fair hair floating down on to her shoulders.

The great hall door stood open. Lucille paused at the point of the stairs which afforded a glimpse of the hall below, and its entrance.

On one of the steps leading down to the drive stood Lucille's father, Sir Evelyn Lee, a man of tall, commanding stature, spare, dignified; now, with head inclined, he was listening to some final words said by a man on horseback who was bending towards him. Lucille could not see her father's face, but somehow even the glimpse she had of him suggested a weight of anxiety, a load of care resting on those usually upright shoulders. The profile of the horseman she could see distinctly: on his brow was

a wide hat, with a single feather ornamenting it, pressed low; the face underneath was hard and set, the high cheek-bones suggested Scotch descent. The rider was dressed in leathern tunic coming down to his knees, where it was met by high boots; he was equipped as one who was about to ride far.

Lucille had been roused in the night by the sound of men's voices, one of them her father's, another a stranger's. Sir Evelyn had spoken from an up-stairs window next to the room in which was the child's cot and the bed of her governess, Mademoiselle Levrier. Mademoiselle was a sound sleeper, and had not been disturbed by the colloquy. Lucille, on the contrary, awakened at the slightest sound; she did not doubt that the man now taking leave of her father was the one who had arrived in the dead of night and so awakened her from sleep.

Lucille was an only child, the companion of her mother, Dame Marjorie Lee; this association had prematurely matured her mind and character, she had begun early to suspect something of the burden and stress of life, to understand a little at any rate of clouds which, hovering over the horizon or gathered in the zenith of the sky, cast reflecting shadows on the faces of Sir Evelyn and Lady Lee.

It was the year 1651, a period upon which men looked back for years afterwards with wistful regret.

The hand of Master Oliver Cromwell rested heavily on the back of the nation, causing those to

stoop who would otherwise have held themselves erect.

Dame Marjorie Lee was by descent a De Saumarez, a noble French family, with wide possessions in Picardy. When Sir Evelyn first married he had not inherited the Grangeland Abbey estate, or the title which went with it. The young couple had settled on the Picardy property, which needed the supervision of a resident owner, having been somewhat neglected during his wife's minority; he had consequently been absent from England during those troublous times when the nation was devastated by Civil war; King and Parliament playing a game of hazard, with the lives of good Englishmen as the dice, and supremacy over the fairest land in the world as the stake.

Master Cromwell had won; King Charles had paid the penalty. Evelyn Lee had more than once longed to come and thrust himself, his sword, and his fortune into the conflict, to takê the side of the King, but his wife had restrained him. Had he been on this side of the Channel the task would have been more difficult, but on the De Saumarez estate in Picardy there was little opportunity for hearing English news until it had grown stale by months of waiting.

The family had been settled at the Abbey for nearly a year when the nation was once more stirred to its depths. Scotland opened its arms to the young

Charles. Cromwell hastened to meet the danger which threatened. The hearts of loyal men beat quickly; swords hanging on the walls of armouries throughout the length and breadth of the land were taken down and polished to a fine glow. Sir Evelyn Lee was one of these men, stirred by the revival of a new hope, ready to lay down life and fortune, if occasion served, on behalf of the Prince whom he regarded as his rightful lord.

This time the influence of Dame Marjorie Lee might have been inoperative, although she would still have held him back; but another cause supervened which entailed quiescence. Sir Evelyn caught a chill, which brought on jaundice; he had only now risen from the bed of convalescence, and was still physically unfit for the labours of a campaign; this fact undoubtedly saved him from the consequences of those days of disaster.

The man on horseback rode away; Sir Evelyn turned into the house. Lucille ran, as she was wont, to greet her father;—these two were always first down in the morning. She stopped suddenly, warned by the look on his face, it was so full of anxiety; his eyes expressed the fact, that his thoughts were far removed from the spacious hall in which he was standing, with its antlered heads on the walls, its polished boards beneath his feet.

Lucille knew that her father was filled with anxiety; the man who had just ridden away had

imparted some information which had stirred him to his depths, perhaps a foreboding of coming ill.

The child moved silently, and passed into the breakfast-room ; her father had not perceived her.

During the days, and even nights, which followed there was a sense of something in the air, something impending, to be hoped for—or to be feared. Lucille found herself more alone than usual, shut out from the companionship of her parents, who were closeted a great deal together. Sometimes the child walked with Mademoiselle Levrier in the park, more often she had a gallop on her rough-haired Dartmoor pony ; if her expedition extended beyond the park, which covered a space of three or four miles, a groom attended upon his young mistress ; generally Lucille preferred to be alone, and would gallop on the soft sward between the high walls of the Grangeland Abbey domain.

Messengers came to the house at odd hours ; Sir Evelyn always received them himself. Lucille longed to be grown up that she might be admitted to the confidence of her elders.

One afternoon, about a week later, she was returning alone from an expedition after wild flowers ; Mademoiselle Levrier was keeping to her room with a bad headache. The afternoon sun filled the landscape with a soft heat haze ; on the previous day rain had fallen somewhat heavily ; now a warm mist obscured the valleys and thickets, giving them a

sense of unreality as if they were visions in a mirage.

The Abbey was beautifully situated ; some fifty yards behind the herb gardens at the back of the mansion flowed the river Avon ; in front was a gravelled drive which swept away on both sides through the park ; before this again was meadowland, on which herds of deer browsed at will ; away to the north was a picturesque wilderness, trees and undergrowth ; it was among these that Lucille had been gathering Nature's bouquet, which she held in her right hand ; from her left dangled the strings of her sun-bonnet. As she emerged from the woodland the long pile of the Abbey buildings came into view ; the house was grey with lichen, with a turret at the top, and the wings, which were battlemented and crenellated, overgrown with ivy.

Suddenly the child stopped. She heard a rustling near her, the sound of some one or something moving through the undergrowth. She had no fear, merely that curiosity which makes walks in the country so alluring, to note the sights and sounds of Nature. Probably the animal approaching her was a stag, some monarch of the herd which had strayed from its fellows.

A minute later she uttered a cry of surprise. The unexpected had happened. Two men came into view. One of them had only just achieved manhood ; his face was swarthy and dark, his nose long and

aquiline, his lips full his chin suggested a certain strength of character, but a dimple in the middle indicated that its owner might easily be moved to laughter. The clothes he was wearing were of a rich texture, blue velvet crossed with silver lace, and a plumed hat upon his head, but the whole was bedraggled and mud-stained. The second man was some dozen years older, broad and fine-looking; much handsomer, Lucille thought, than the dark-browed youth who had first attracted her attention. For a moment she felt tempted to run away; then, summoning her courage to her aid, she drew herself up to her full height, nothing very stupendous, and reminded herself she was the heiress of Grangeland Abbey.

The strangers bowed to her, hat in hand.

"Do you know, gentlemen, that this land is private property? it belongs to my father, Sir Evelyn Lee."

The young man smiled; as he did so his eyes lighted up, and assumed an attraction which had been lacking before.

"I am very glad to hear it," he said, "we suspected as much,"—glancing towards his companion, "but were not quite sure. Your father is a very good friend of ours, Mistress——"

"My name is Lucille," she prompted, with a shy dignity which was infinitely becoming.

"Mistress Lucille!—I thank you for the introduction; you will forgive me if mine is not proffered in

return ; it will be best for both our sakes for me to remain unknown."

Here the older man struck in somewhat impatiently. "Forgive me, sir, but we must not waste time. We shall be grateful, young lady, if you will conduct us as soon as may be to your father."

"Better still, if Sir Evelyn can be persuaded to come to us. The way to the house, which I see over yonder, lies across grass-land mighty pleasant to the eye, but inconvenient to those who have a wish to remain unobserved."

"My father is in his library," Lucille volunteered; "he has been out but little of late."

"I know," the young man interrupted, "he has been ill, otherwise I am well assured that Sir Evelyn would have been——"

"H'st!" his companion interrupted, "the trees may have ears."

"If so, they have a most inconvenient gift,"—he turned to Lucille again, "kindly communicate with your father as quickly as possible, but to his ear only : tell him two strangers seek his assistance, and that one at least has a right to ask his service,"—there was a dignity about the way these last words were said which impressed the child's understanding.

"I will go quickly, sir," she cried, "and I am sure my father will come immediately."

Lucille sped across the grass as fast as she could run. The two gentlemen stood watching her, the

overhanging branches of the trees hiding them from view; perhaps they thought she made a pretty picture, her fair hair floating out behind her, glinting with gold as the sun's rays rested upon it; perhaps their minds were too intent on the affair which had brought them there, and the need for action which lay before them, to give her a thought.

The child found her father pacing up and down on the terraced walk, his head bent, his left hand on the hilt of his sword. Now and again he straightened himself as if fired by some new idea, but the reaction came afterwards, betokening a greater depression. Although convalescent Sir Evelyn was still feeling the effects of his illness.

Lucille ran up to him. He turned sharply at the sound of her footsteps, as one does who is on the alert for news.

"What is it, my child?"

She had arrived breathless; it was a minute or two before she could speak

"Two gentlemen wish to speak to you, father."

"Where are they?"

"At the edge of the brake."

"Why have they not come to the Abbey?"

"I think they did not wish to be seen; they looked——"

"Yes?"

"As if they had come a long way."

"I will come at once," Sir Evelyn announced.

Lucille turned back without another word; her father pacing by her side. They found the two gentlemen exactly as she had left them.

Sir Evelyn uttered an exclamation; what it meant Lucille could not tell; she had never heard that tone in her father's voice before.

The younger man took a step forward. Sir Evelyn hastened up to him and at once did something which awakened surprise in the child's mind; he bent his knee on the grass, and raised the young man's hand to his lips.

"You are Sir Evelyn Lee?"

"At your service, Sire."

"A poor service, i'faith. I am but a fugitive."

"I grieve to know it," Sir Evelyn responded gravely.

"The fortune of war, and somewhat, perchance, the miscarriage of my friends. Let me introduce one of the most faithful of them; Sir Evelyn Lee, this is my Lord Milton."

The two thus introduced bowed and shook hands.

"We have no time to lose," Lord Milton suggested, "they are hot-foot after us; in fact, we could almost have touched them as we lay in a ditch some three miles away as the crow flies." As he spoke he flicked some dry mud off his knee-breeches.

The young man struck in: "We look to you, Sir Evelyn, to put us across the river, if you can manage it. Once on the other side of the Avon, my Lord,

here, knows of a route by which we can escape to the coast, a friend supplying horses."

Lucille had stood listening to this conversation with both eyes and ears wide open ; some instinct told her that events of great import were being transacted in her presence. It was the child's first glimpse of actual romance, for which all the mysterious happenings which had gone before had prepared her mind.

"Come further, Sire, under the shadow of the trees ; some of the windows of the Abbey command this spot ; in these days servants are not altogether to be trusted ; some of ours have only been with us a short while."

Sir Evelyn moved further back into the thicket, followed by the two strangers, Lucille bringing up the rear.

When the trees overshadowed them completely, Sir Evelyn stopped, then he turned and said : "I think I can do better than you propose, Sire ; to get to the river you must cross the open, some eyes would be sure to be upon us, a hue-and-cry would be raised immediately, and we should all pay the penalty."

"What would you suggest, Sir Evelyn ?" Lord Milton asked eagerly ; "time presses ; we cannot have more than half-an-hour's start at the outside."

"I have a hiding-place into which no one will ever penetrate ; only two persons are aware of its existence,

my wife, Dame Marjorie Lee, and myself; you two can remain there in safety for some hours; when the darkness comes on I will, myself, take you across the Avon, and see you to the destination my Lord Milton has in his mind."

"Thank you, Sir Evelyn, your kindness will not be forgotten when happier days come,"—the young man shrugged his shoulders and laughed lightly—"I believe in my future, a creed which all my friends do not share."

"Is it possible to find such a hiding-place?" Lord Milton interposed.

"You may rest assured," Sir Evelyn responded quietly, "I will guarantee the safety of both of you with my own head."

"Mind you, they will know the direction in which we have come; this estate will be under suspicion; Master Cromwell has no great faith in the affection of Sir Evelyn Lee, else we should not be here; every thicket and glade will be searched, every covert will be pricked by the troopers; no undergrowth will be dense enough to hide us for long."

Sir Evelyn bowed gravely: "I will take all risk, you may trust me, Sire."

The young man stretched out his hand; his face assumed a look which made Lucille doubt her former judgment as to his ugliness.

"I do trust you," he said, "I place myself with entire confidence in your hands,"

"Thank you, Sire, with all my heart."

"This is no time for fine speeches," Lord Milton said almost roughly, a shade, of jealousy perhaps, had passed across his face.

"I will lead the way," Sir Evelyn answered at once, "if you will kindly follow, Sire."

Lucille wondered what could be in her father's mind ; she thought she knew every glade of the park, and could think of no hiding-place ; she followed with much curiosity.

Sir Evelyn struck a narrow path which wound in and out among the trees, going further and further away from the Abbey. Lucille knew this led to some ruins in which once she had sought to play, but had been warned not to do so because of the sacred character and history attaching to these stones.

They reached an open space ; in the centre was a ruined chapel, which had been once used for service by the resident chaplain of the family ; this was in the days before the Reformation. Since then the building had been allowed to fall into decay ; brambles climbed about it, and wreathed themselves within the unglazed windows. The structure had been very firmly built, and buttressed, or it would have suffered more by the neglect of years. Grass grew in the interstices of the stones, and on the floor of the building, upon which, in the winter, the rains of heaven beat, penetrating between the open rafters of the roof, and driving in through the windows.

Lucille had always regarded the spot with some awe ; she had pictured ghosts about it in the night-time, and had given it a wide berth even by day. Some of the older servants of the Abbey had imparted to the child the superstition with regard to the place which obtained in the neighbourhood ; the ghosts that were supposed to walk in the forgotten aisles, the sounds of solemn service which floated upon the air coming from the ruined chapel after nightfall. No man, or woman, in the district would have passed through the thicket to that destination, after the sun had set, for any consideration whatever. But even Lucille understood that these circumstances would not weigh with any soldiers who should come in pursuit of the fugitives. What was in her father's mind ?—the child was on the tip-toe of curiosity and expectation. She realized, too, that her father had quite forgotten her presence ; beneath was a lurking knowledge that had he seen her he would have sent her away ; she had consequently hung back throughout.

“ Is this a ruined chapel, Sir Evelyn ? ” the young man questioned, “ it seems to be given up to bats and owls ; you did not bring us here, I take it, to offer a parable of the fortunes of our House ? ”

“ No, Sire, but to afford you a safe, and unsuspected, cover.”

As he spoke Sir Evelyn, to make sure no one was following, turned round. Then, for the first time, he

perceived that Lucille had come with the party. He spoke to her more sharply than he had ever done in his life :

“ You ought not to have followed, child ; I thought you had returned home.”

Lucille's face fell, and her eyes filled with tears. The young man interposed, resting his hand on her shoulder. “ Let her come, Sir Evelyn,” he said, “ she will not betray us, of that I am assured ; ” he lifted the child's chin and looked into her eyes, then he kissed her lightly on her forehead, between the strands of her hair. “ You promise to keep silent ? ” he said.

“ Yes, quite, quite ! ”

“ I know you will ; you were my first friend ; I saw you with the sun kissing your pretty hair, I thought it a vision and omen of hope.”

These words remained imprinted on Lucille's memory, never afterwards forgotten ; although they were said lightly enough.

Sir Evelyn looked at his daughter with pride and affection in his eyes.

“ She is a good child,” he said, “ but doubtless has the disability of her sex.”

“ Yet,” the young man averred, “ have I known women who could keep their counsel ; aye, and another's secret, as well as any man, perhaps better.”

“ That is true ; and I think Lucille is old enough to understand the nature of a promise ; she is a curious child and old beyond her years.”

The young man looked at Lucille with a penetrating gaze, as if he would read her very soul. The child met his eyes with frank trustfulness; there was something in them differing from any she had seen before, large, brown, deep. She could not find a comparison in her short experience to illustrate what she felt; had she been able the suggestion might have come to her of a well, apparently with only a modicum of water in it when first noticed, but as you looked down and your eyes grew accustomed and focussed upon it you realized there were depths beneath.

This young man went through life leaving upon the majority the impression of carelessness, a love of ease, a desire to take ever the path of least difficulty, but to the few who saw beneath there was a fixedness of will, a strength of character underlying that surface effect almost calculatingly produced.

"I believe you, Sir Evelyn; I should like to have her on my side all my life."

They were all by this time within the ruined chapel of the Lees; Lucille, as before, last. The evening sunlight came in through the open door. Sir Evelyn passed round behind what had once been a stone altar, now with a great crack across it, in which various mosses had found habitation. Behind this, again, on the north side was the supporting column of the roof; above came the span of the chancel with a similar column meeting it on the

other side. Sir Evelyn apparently rested against the stone-work. As he did so it began to move, revolving backwards, disclosing a space in the column wide enough to admit a man.

He turned round and said: "This way, Sire;" then disappeared from view.

The young man followed with alacrity, Lord Milton immediately afterwards. Lucille did not go in, but awaited permission in the chapel itself; her eyes were agape with astonishment.

A second or two later the young man came back for her.

"Come!" he said, "I missed you; I want my omen of hope to illuminate the prison to which I am consigned."

The word prison made the child give a little shudder, coupled as it was with a natural fear of the dark space within the wall into which she was about to go.

The young man took her by the arm: "Courage," he whispered, "there are worse places than this, I can assure you; follow me."

Lucille did as she was bid, and was in time to find her father lighting a lantern with flint and steel. They were all standing in a small chamber, which was in better repair than the sacred building of which it was an adjunct. The frame of a bedstead was at one end with a straw mattress upon it; two stout wooden chairs and a washhandstand, also of

solid material, completed the furniture. In a rack on the wall was some crockery.

To the child it was an abode of mystery, which she surveyed with startling apprehension ; not so to her elders.

"This room has been useful in its time," Lord Milton remarked.

"Yes, my Lord, it has not lacked guests, or a guest, at any rate, for long together."

"Friends who could not well be accommodated at the Abbey," the young man commented, with a light laugh.

"Just so !"

"By the Blood ! I should not like to trespass on this hospitality for long, Sir Evelyn ; it would give me the creeps."

"I trust, Sire, it will only be a matter of a few hours."

Sir Evelyn had hung the lantern to a peg on the wall. He now sat down heavily on one of the chairs, his face haggard and drawn.

CHAPTER II

THE SEARCH

LUCILLE ran to her father, and wound her arms round his neck ; she kissed him on his forehead, it felt clammy to her touch ; suddenly she remembered how ill he had been, and that this was his first walk of any distance since.

Lord Milton, too, understood the situation. Out of a valise he had strapped to his back he produced a curiously-shaped silver flask, unscrewed the top, and then handed it to Sir Evelyn, who seemed incapable of speech.

"It is the best eau-de-vie and has never paid duty ; the very medicine you want."

Sir Evelyn swallowed a little and coughed. The blood returned to his face, which had been white before.

Lucille looked gratefully at Lord Milton ; the young man was watching sympathetically. Perhaps he appreciated now for the first time the fact that Sir Evelyn Lee had really been physically unfit to unsheath a sword on his behalf.

Lord Milton pressed another sip on the baronet, and induced him to take it.

Afterwards Sir Evelyn seemed to have regained his physical strength ; he stood up once more.

" Pardon me, Sire, for sitting down in your presence unbidden ; my legs gave way under me."

" Your appearance would have served as an excuse in any case, but please regard me as your guest, and a very ordinary individual !"

" I cannot well do that, Sire."

" You must try," the young man added ; " you will also remember that an ordinary individual requires sustenance ; in other words, I have indications within me that I have not tasted food for several hours, and that I shall soon be devilish hungry. I suppose the last tenant of this room did not leave a pasty, or crust of bread here ?"

" It would be some months stale if he had," Sir Evelyn responded. He considered for a minute before going on, then he said : " It would attract attention if I were to come in this direction myself again ; besides, what little strength I have left will be required to set you safely across the Avon to-night. My wife, Dame Marjorie, will be able to come with less notice, especially if she dresses as Lucille's governess, or as a servant, and brings the child with her."

" Ffaith, your good lady will come as an angel of light if she brings a well-lined basket, whatever she may have on."

Sir Evelyn did not seem inclined to resume the conversation in this light vein; he turned to go, holding his hand to Lucille to lead her out; stepping backwards as in the presence of royalty.

The young man flung himself down on the mattress.

"You had better make yourself comfortable, my Lord; we are like to learn a lesson of patience for some hours yet; anyway, this is better than a wet ditch or Master Cromwell's guard-room."

Lucille and her father passed round the decayed altar and so out into the nave of the chapel.

Suddenly he gripped her arm, and drew her behind the great oak door, which now always stood open; in fact, the growths of ivy and bramble prevented it from closing.

Sounds came from without. Beyond the strip of woodland lay the wall of the park, and outside that, again, the high road. From this direction came the clatter of horses' feet, the champing of bits, the jingling of accoutrements.

As Sir Evelyn and Lucille stood listening intently, the child, at any rate, with beating heart, throbbing so that she could hear it mingling with the other sounds from without, the noise of passing men grew less distinct, until it came only faintly upon their ears.

"They are looking for an entrance," her father commented; "now we must hurry to the Abbey, child, and be there before they arrive."

So saying, he stepped cautiously from behind the door and left the chapel, Lucille still holding his hand. They returned by a different route from the one they had taken on coming. It was now nearly six o'clock; the sun was approaching its setting; its beams lay athwart the wide landscape; a white mist was beginning to wreath the bottoms, between which ran the river; from the higher ground they could see the gleam of the waters dyed red, as if some great battle had been waged and coloured the stream with the life-blood of those who had fallen. Lucille ever afterwards pictured this scene; the Abbey, for the first time, stood up in her imagination grim and foreboding. She felt she had come close to the secrets of life, her spirits sank as she ran to keep pace with her father's stride.

Dame Marjorie was standing to await them on the gravelled terrace before the Abbey windows; she hurried in their direction as soon as she saw them, her eyes fixed anxiously on her husband's face.

"What has happened, Evelyn?" she whispered.

The baronet glanced at the windows in front of him before replying, as if each of them might be endowed with an ear, a curiosity for a secret. Then he replied *sotto voce*: "Two fugitives have taken refuge; I was just in time to hide them."

"Ah!" Lady Lee laid her hand on her heart, her face was white; perhaps first of all she thought of

husband and home in jeopardy, then of these unbidden guests; her husband's tone had conveyed the importance of the arrivals.

"Is it he?"

"Yes, and one other, my Lord Milton."

Lady Lee gave a little shudder: "God help him," she said, "if he should fall into their hands;" she, too, could see the river dyed red; her imagination went back to an event which made hearts tingle for years afterwards, to a stage before Whitehall Palace, a life, the most august, offered on the shrine of his enemies' desires, while brave and loyal hearts bled, while men gnashed their teeth and women wept because they were powerless to help.

"Please God they will not," Sir Evelyn responded.

"What do you propose, husband?"

"To convey them across the river at the dead of night when the hue-and-cry have passed. My Lord Milton undertakes to get him to the coast and thence to safety."

"God grant it! better exiled than——" she broke off with choking voice.

"Yes, a hundred times," Sir Evelyn put in, responding to the thought.

At this moment Dame Marjorie realized the presence of the child.

"Lucille! this is no place for you," she said, "you must remember nothing of what you have heard."

"She has already promised; she was the first to

bring the news, and the Prince insisted upon her coming with us ; he regarded her as an omen of good when the sun shone upon her hair."

"His father was ever superstitious, I have heard," Dame Marjorie commented.

"I will never tell any one anything of this, mother," Lucille declared ; "do let me stay?"

"The child comes into our plans," Sir Evelyn said.

"In what way?" Lady Lee inquired in some surprise.

"They will need food in the chamber at the chapel, I have promised that you shall take it to them later on when the darkness has begun to fall dressed as Mademoiselle Levrier, or one of the serving-maids, Lucille accompanying you."

"Why not go yourself, Evelyn?"

"I should be the more noticed, especially carrying a basket ; but there is another reason, too, my strength failed me just now, and what I have to do later will tax the little resources I have left."

Dame Marjorie wound her arm round her husband's shoulder, and took stock of his face with searching gaze.

"I am forgetting you, husband," she said. "Come in, and let me get you a posset."

"Presently, dear heart ; now there come those who will want to ask questions ; do you take Lucille and go within."

They could all hear the rhythmical beat of hoofs on the gravel drive; then round the corner of a coppice came a company of dragoons, with a burly officer riding in front.

"Go; I can manage them better alone."

Lady Lee, taking Lucille's hand, did as she was bid.

The soldiers rode up, halting sharply at the word of command. The commander swung himself down from the saddle and came to the baronet's side. He wore a conical hat, ornamented only by a silver buckle at the side; his forehead was broad, his gaze strong and piercing; a short ill-kept beard concealed, and yet suggested, a powerful chin, which he projected forward as he spoke.

"I am Major Josiah Walker, sent by General Harrison, in pursuit of Charles Stuart, in rebellion against the laws and liberties of this Realm."

Sir Evelyn, at the introduction, bowed with the same grace as if it had been given by a courteous gentleman.

"You are Sir Evelyn Lee, I presume?"

"At your service, Major Walker."

"Not at all at my service, I suspect; but if you hide anything from me I will have your neck stretched on yonder elm," pointing to the largest tree in the thicket below.

"I do not think threats are necessary from one gentleman to another."

"I have no time to bandy words with you. We have traced Charles Stuart almost to the walls of your park, and must make inquisition throughout your house and property. If he is found hiding with your connivance you will be pronounced traitor, and suffer accordingly."

"I am content to take that risk."

The Major eyed Sir Evelyn fiercely. "You know more than you choose to tell. By the Book! I should like to put you to the question."

"There are still laws in England, I understand," Sir Evelyn answered with dignity; "no man is bound to incriminate himself, nor are witnesses liable to be tortured, if I am well informed."

"You are warned, anyway," Major Walker answered roughly. "Now to the search." He turned and gave a word of command. The company split up into fours and began a systematic scrutiny of every point of cover which the grounds and park offered. The Major himself with two subordinate officers entered the Abbey; Sir Evelyn followed.

"We shall take your house from top to bottom; you had better attend upon us with the keys."

"I regret I am too indisposed to place myself at your disposal; this is the first day I have been out since an attack of jaundice."

"All the better for you, I suspect," the Major broke in sharply.

Sir Evelyn smiled, it was perfectly true ; his illness had saved him from participating in the downfall of his master.

"My major-domo will act in my stead," he said. "There are women in the house, you will not disturb them unnecessarily?"

"As long as they hide nothing they have nothing to fear ; we are God-fearing men."

"I am glad to be assured of it." The baronet clapped his hands ; a middle-aged servant in the black and puce livery of the Lees appeared.

"Clarkson, place yourself under the orders of this gentleman, who wishes to see over the Abbey."

"Who is looking for a traitor, and recusant," broke in the officer roughly ; "if such an one is hidden here it will be at the peril of all your necks."

"That will do ; Clarkson, conduct this gentleman ; when the search is finished lay a collation in the refectory."

Major Walker unbent a little at the last remark. "It will not be unwelcome," he admitted, "we have ridden far and fast this day."

At this moment Lady Lee came forward, herself carrying a posset on a silver tray ; she handed it to her husband.

"My lord has been ill and has only to-day taken his first airing."

As she spoke she made a curtesy to the Major.

"So I understand, madam ; I regret to be here on an unpleasant errand." The Major had now removed his hat, which he had worn on entering.

"A soldier must do his duty, sir, of that we are well aware. Doubtless you will make it as pleasant as possible under the circumstances."

"You know what I am here for?" he inquired sharply.

"I was within hearing of what passed just now," Lady Lee responded quietly.

The Major turned away. "A woman ever has an answer ready, else would she not be a woman," he said to himself.

For an hour the search proceeded within the walls, and outside the Abbey. The two concealed men heard the sound of voices close to them, and held their breath. The ruined chapel received its due meed of attention, but no one suspected the hidden chamber behind the arch ; the woods outside were beaten to the very walls ; every thicket and brake was stirred and probed ; deer were startled from their hiding-places, and flung away resentful, tossing their heads and coughing, but the secret remained inviolate, as it had done for two centuries. Planned by some wily brain, during the Wars of the Roses, this annexe of the chapel was so artfully contrived that its very existence could be only suspected after accurate measurement of the external wall, and even this had become well-nigh impossible, as lichen and ivy, moss

and creeper had clothed every part of the building in a thick green coverture.

Major Walker satisfied himself that the Abbey from turret to cellâr concealed no hidden men ; he tapped wainscot and wall ; he listened for hollows under the floor, and looked for trap-doors into the roof, but all his efforts were unrewarded ; he and his subaltern officers sat down sullen and discontented to the cold meats and pasties their reluctant but hospitable host provided. After the meal the commanding officer went out and received the reports of those responsible for the various bands which had investigated the park from end to end. Straggling they entered, and one by one asserted that either the news which had reached them was incorrect, perhaps intended to deceive, or that the Royal fugitive had in some way evaded their grasp. They were wasting time ; the bugle sounded to horse.

Sir Evelyn Lee came out to see the party off, and could not but afford them a certain measure of approbation for the soldierly qualities displayed as they mounted, and formed fours, before riding away.

It was an admirable machine, as Sir Evelyn admitted to himself, wielded and fashioned by the iron will of one man, who had made of it a weapon before which all others proved but weak and inefficient. Loyalty and courage, ardour and enthusiasm were unable alone to cope with the iron substance which

Master Cromwell had fashioned out of the minds and bodies of the men he swayed.

Parting, Major Walker turned to say : " We have not found him whom we came to seek ; if we have been illuded by artifice it will go hardly, sir, with you and yours ; if your innocence is what it seems, on the surface, you have nothing to fear, Sir Evelyn Lee, from the present rightful rulers of this land."

The owner of the Abbey merely bowed in response.

By this time the evening shadows were laying long fingers over the landscape. The reaches of the river were dark where the waters a short time before had been dyed red by the setting sun. A cold wind began to sweep up the bed of the stream, curling its waters into small waves, souging in the tree-tops.

Sir Evelyn shivered slightly, and turned back into the house. He found his wife sitting at her needle-work, the governess and Lucille in the room.

" Our friends have gone," he said, and shot her a glance.

Presently she rose, and left the apartment. She was about to make ready, from the provisions the Major and his companions had not consumed, a basket of sustenance for the fugitives.

CHAPTER III

SANCTUARY

DAME MARJORIE and Lucille left the Abbey by a small side-door which opened out into the herb garden, and through that to the banks of the Avon. Lady Lee had dressed herself in sombre fashion; worn for mourning some years earlier, she preferred this to donning garments belonging to any one else. Under her cloak she carried a basket packed with provisions and a small bottle of canary wine. Sir Evelyn let them out himself and shut the door after them, not without some considerable anxiety, lest the wit of Major Walker should have left behind hidden watchers who might discover their errand.

Lucille was tip-toe with expectation and excitement; she danced along by the side of her mother, now on this foot now on that, until she had to be bidden to walk more quietly.

Their course lay for some four hundred yards along the further side of the park wall, where by this time the darkness lay thick. Lady Lee listened for every sound, starting if a weasel ran across the

track, or a pheasant crowed from a tree-top within the enclosure. A great white owl fled suddenly close to their faces, and then swooped down upon some small prey by the river edge. Lucille clapped her hands on seeing it, but Lady Lee uttered a little cry, which she suppressed instantly.

Thus they made the detour, and came to a narrow gateway in the park wall, used only by those who, possessing the key, wanted to reach the boat-house, the outline of which could be seen from this point.

Lady Lee inserted the key in the lock and opened the door; Lucille followed her through. Within the park they stood breathless, listening for any sound, but none came save those of night and nature. Here they had to cross an open space of greensward, where their figures would show distinctly if any one was hidden in the covert. They traversed this almost at a run, and so came to the spinny in which lay the deserted chapel. Here they had to go single file; the child led the way, knowing it the better of the two; her mother following.

Now and again Lucille turned to warn Lady Lee, in a whisper, of a bramble across the path threatening to tear their faces, or a root stretching out over which they were likely to stumble.

So, without adventure, they came to the chapel, and passed in.

* We will wait, Lucille, for a minute to make sure

we have not been followed." So saying Lady Lee stood leaning against the stout frame of the open door.

For the first time the child felt afraid ; it was very dark within ; even her mother's outline was vague and indistinct, silhouetted against the night air and the further sky ; Lucille had heard tales, not a few, of strange sights and sounds connected with the sacred building in which she now stood, monks with cowls half hiding faces deathly white, pacing up and down ; the sound of women crying ; the chanting of unutterable music. She felt herself grow pale, her ears pricked she knew not for what ; her whole being vibrant with attention.

Was that a muffled groan, or was it the sound of some one moving ? it came from the direction of the concealed chamber where the broken altar testified to past rites and present neglect.

These are the things which fasten on a child's imagination, leaving an indelible mark. Lucille lived over again for many years in vivid recollection that visit under the cover of darkness to the ruined shrine.

Lady Lee satisfied herself that the sounds they both heard came from the prisoners themselves, who doubtless were aware that the pressure of search and risk of capture had abated. She moved forwards with cautious step lest she should stumble over some unexpected obstacle on the floor of the chapel. Lucille followed her mother with a hand on her

skirt, white and trembling ; peering into the darkness where it lay deepest, under the shadow of the great arch.

It took Lady Lee some time to find the stone in which the concealed spring was artfully embedded ; these moments of waiting were a terrible trial to the child ; she gave a little sob of thankfulness when she heard the slight click and the sound of stone rubbing against stone, as the masonry revolved towards them.

The men within must have been listening acutely, no doubt their anxiety being sharpened by hunger ; for they, too, heard at once the warning sound of approach.

"Who is without ? who comes ?" The tone had something of command in it, and yet of youth.

"A friend, Marjorie Lee."

So saying she stepped into the passage, and once more Lucille threaded its narrow path, which smelt of damp stone, the exhalation of the vault into which no sun, and very little air, ever penetrated.

The light of the lantern dimly illuminated the narrow apartment.

"You come as an angel of light, madam," the young man said, extending his hand, "no one was ever more welcome since the world began,"—he raised Lady Lee's fingers to his lips, gallantly bowing over them. Lord Milton at the same time relieved her of the basket which had become a heavy weight, resting on her left arm.

"What you bring, my lady, is likewise most welcome."

"Ah! here is my fairy of hope."

Lucille found herself lifted up and kissed affectionately. "I feel you are my friend," the young man said, "friendship is like the gourd sometimes, that I used to hear of in Holy Writ, which grew up mighty swiftly."

"It is to be hoped that Your Highness's friendship does not pass as rapidly as that herb," Lord Milton commented dryly.

"You do not think that, little lady?"—the young man eyed her with a compelling glance.

Lucille gave a little curtsey, following the example of her mother, who had done the same just before.

"No, Sire," she said, "I do not think it."

"You trust me?"—he was still bending towards her.

"Yes, Sire."

He turned with a shrug of the shoulders and a light laugh to his companion. "You are a witness, Milton, that there is one heart who believes in Charles, probably it is only one in all this realm of England."

"Nay, say not that, Sire," Lady Lee protested; "there are thousands."

"I faith, I am glad to hear it. I cannot say I have seen the proof of what you state, my lady, very clearly; but doubtless I am prejudiced."

"One day, Your Majesty," Lady Lee said, "you will have cause to believe that I have spoken truth when millions of hearts and throats acclaim you before the world."

"A prophetess, a prophetess!" he cried; then he paced the chamber from end to end with rapid strides, returning once more to the spot hard by the entrance of the passage where he had stood to receive his guests. "Your prophecy is difficult to believe, madam, at night, and here; night is ever a time of gloom and foreboding when fortune fails to smile, and to a hunted man deserted by his friends, hated by his enemies, with death stalking him as hounds pursue the deer in the covert, this that you say is hard of credit." He turned once more swiftly to Lucille, standing there looking at him with her childish eyes distended, grave, trying to understand, wondering greatly, not a little fearful. "You make me hope," he said, "almost more than your mother's words; doubtless, child, you will remember this visit to a man in prison who might have been differently circumstanced if the fates had been propitious."

"I shall remember," she said, "and I shall pray for you, Sire, always."

The young man smiled: "That can do me no harm, and may even do me good." As he spoke he drew from his finger a solitary ring which he was wearing; it was a plain signet with the word "Spes" and a fleur-de-lis engraven upon it. He took Lucille's

small white hand into his own, and tried it on her slim fingers one after the other, smiling at the fatuity of the effort; even her thumb could not hold it tightly in place. Then he opened the palm of her hand, and placed the ring in the centre. "There!" he said, "I give it to you; you will have to wear it round your neck, it is too large for such maiden fingers." He still looked into the depths of her eyes; his face grew more grave: "One day," he went on, "your mother's prophecy and your prayers may be fulfilled; if that day comes you may want something within my power to bestow; should that happen remember that I owe you a debt, perchance even the debt of my life, and that you can claim what you will in return."

Lucille's hand tightened over the ring.

"She does not know how to thank Your Majesty," Lady Lee put in, for the child was tongue-tied.

"Make a curtsy, and kiss His Majesty's hand," her mother suggested.

Instead Lucille bent her knee till it touched the ground, the earthen floor of the cell. The young man laid his hand on her head:

"Your name?" he inquired, having forgotten.

"Lucille," she answered, so low that it barely reached his ears.

"Lucille Lee; it is a pretty combination; I shall remember; and do you remember, too, that you have my promise." He kissed her on hair and forehead,

from which her hat had fallen back as she knelt, then he straightened himself and turned to Lord Milton, who had stood watching the scene half amused, half impatient. "You are a witness, my Lord, that I have pledged my faith."

"It is all Your Majesty has to pledge," Lord Milton commented dryly. "Yes, I am a witness if needs be; and now may I suggest that this basket hangs heavy on my finger, and I, at any rate, am fain to lighten it."

CHAPTER IV

IN THE NIGHT

LUCILLE lay awake in her small white bed. It was an unwonted experience ; as a rule she slept from the moment her head touched the pillow until her call in the morning. Now her thoughts were in a turmoil ; she was revolving what had passed, fearing what was to come, listening to every sound in the great house, imagining noises where there were none, fearing for the man who had captured her imagination, and stirred her heart with a childish loyalty and devotion ; he was in peril she knew well, during those hours in which she lay secure in her bed ; her father, too, he was up and doing, while her mother awaited the issue.

They had come back from the chapel immediately after the presentation of the ring, following the same route pursued on their way there. Nothing had happened ; they had re-entered the Abbey without having been missed ; Sir Evelyn had kissed them both as if reuniting with them after some prolonged absence instead of barely an hour ; he expressed in

his face that he was satisfied by the way the errand had been accomplished. Lucille had come in for a share of her father's approval; it had warmed her heart, and made up for all she had passed through during that night visit filled with sombre apprehension. She had partaken of supper with her parents, then been put to bed by her waiting-maid, Ruth Marlot, a girl of that countryside, who had talked of the happenings of that afternoon, wondered what the soldiers were in search of, and speculated as to whether they would come again. Lucille had listened to Ruth's chatter, and said but little in response, remembering she had been trusted to keep her own counsel. Mademoiselle Levrier had retired to rest later; she slept while the child lay awake. The wind, which had been fitful earlier in the evening, blew almost a gale as the night advanced; Lucille could hear it moaning round the house, rustling the leaves of the ivy growing by the windows, reverberant in the chimneys.

Presently there came a suggestion of movement from the floor below of doors softly opened and then shut, of stealthy tread in the great hall which ran through the centre of the Abbey from front to back.

Lucille could stand it no longer; jumping out of bed, she slipped on a warm cape over her night-rail, then ran to the door, treading softly lest she should rouse her governess. Opening it, she went out. A

gallery ran round this upper floor ; the child was just tall enough to lean over it, and see what lay below. Her father and mother were crossing the hall together, the latter carrying a small lamp, with which she had evidently lightened his entrance ; suddenly he uttered something between a sigh and a groan and rested his hand on Dame Marjorie's shoulder ; then he half slipped down, first on to one knee, then on to both. Lady Lee gave a little cry, and with difficulty saved herself from dropping the lamp. Lucille sped along the gallery and ran down the broad staircase, and so across the hall to her father's side. He was by this time lying on the floor supported by one elbow. She threw her arm round him and kissed him ; how cold his forehead was under her touch—and damp. Even she knew he was fainting.

“Can you hold him, child, while I fetch a cordial ? do not be afraid, he is only exhausted.”

“No, mother, I will try not to be.”

Lady Lee placed the lamp on the floor, and hurried away herself to the butler's pantry close to the kitchens.

Lucille sat on the ground, her father's head pillowed on her lap ; it seemed to her that he was dying, that she was very close to the great sorrow of her life. For the second time that night the character of the girl was being moulded in that crucible out of which fine issues come, to those adapted to benefit by the experience. She had tears in her eyes, which trickled

slowly down her cheeks, but whether for herself, he father, or her mother, she could not have told.

Sir Evelyn lay quite still, hardly breathing, emaciated by his late illness, his face haggard and wan in the lamplight. On one side of the hall was a great fire-place, in which logs were burnt throughout the day resting on iron dogs; these were still smouldering, and occasionally would send up a little shaft of flame or a small column of blue smoke, into the open chimney-stack above. The wind came down and met these emanations from the dying fire, driving them into the hall. Lucille could smell the smouldering wood; it remained ever afterwards an association, when it assailed her nostrils, with the happenings of that night.

After what seemed a long time, really only a few minutes, Lady Lee reappeared; she carried a Venetian glass in her hand, filled with some ruby liquid, some rare old wine; now it was she who supported Sir Evelyn's shoulders, and made him drink. He revived almost instantly, colour coming into his face instead of the pallor which had been there before.

"I am better now," he said, "it came on so suddenly; I had no warning."

Lady Lee looked round fearfully lest Sir Evelyn's voice should wake the household, and make them suspect that something was afoot.

"Come," she whispered, "take a little more, then we will go into the library; it is safer than talking here."

Sir Evelyn did as he was bid, draining the glass to the bottom. After this he felt able to rise, and together they all three went to the library, Lady Lee shutting the door behind them.

"You ought to have been asleep hours ago, Lucille."

"I did try, mother! but how could I?—I knew that father was in danger."

Sir Evelyn had sat himself down in a great chair, glad to rest his aching limbs; he took the child's hand into his as she stood by his side.

"You are a good little daughter, and one day you will make a good woman like your mother."

Lady Lee knelt down on the other side of him.

"How has it sped?" she asked.

"All went well; we saw no one. I ferried His Majesty and Lord Milton across the river, the wind behind us. They thanked me warmly enough; horses had been provided, there was a man holding them under the trees of Copley Wood; he pretended to be a countryman, but his bearing belied his appearance, suggesting a higher rank. They wished me 'good-bye,' and I in return prayed for their safety; so they rode off into the darkness, making eastward towards the coast."

"I pray God they may not be stopped," Lady Lee said.

Sir Evelyn bowed his head in response: "Many hearts in England echo that prayer to-night."

"And yet the King flies," Lady Lee commented sadly.

"Yes, but he will come into his own again; I feel assured of that; this madness of the people cannot last; this setting up on high places, the highest of the land, upstarts from the people." After a pause Sir Evelyn went on: "It was the coming back which tried me, I had to fight against the wind crossing the stream, and was carried some distance away from the landing-stage; my strength is not what it was, as I soon found to my cost."

"That will return, too, husband."

He looked into her eyes: "What a help-meet you are, Marjorie, you have ever given me wise counsel and courage when I needed it."

At this moment a sound struck upon all their ears.

"Hush!—what is that?" Lady Evelyn cried, but she knew all the same.

It came again, a loud, persistent knocking on the great hall door.

All sorts of speculations filled their minds. Charles and his companion? that was the first thought, but surely an impossible one; they could not have returned across the Avon, no other boat being available for miles save that belonging to the Abbey. The second theory was the more probable—a searching party for the fugitives, perhaps even the return of those who had been there already, perhaps another band on a similar errand.

It was Dame Marjorie's quick wit which came to their aid at this juncture.

"This knocking will rouse the household in a few minutes ; Lucille and I must to bed instantly ; to be up at this hour would arouse suspicion, more than suspicion, certainty of guilt."

"Guilt !" Sir Evelyn echoed, misliking the word.

"Yes, guilt in their eyes, though honour, truth, and loyalty in ours." She went on : "You will to the door, Evelyn, after you have put on a loose coat as if rising from your bed, or just about to retire there. Come, Lucille, there is no time to be lost."

With a pressure on her husband's hand, Lady Lee crossed the library quickly, the child following. Hardly were they in their rooms before a still more imperative summons came from the back of the Abbey as well as the front, the door being almost broken in which let upon the servants' offices.

Lucille had just crept into bed when Mademoiselle Levrier roused herself with a start. She cried out her alarm in French ; then remembered herself, and asked in English : "What is happening, Lucille ? Do you hear those knocks ; who can it be ?"

The governess began to rise from her bed.

"I expect, Mademoiselle, it is the soldiers come back again who searched the house this evening."

"Oh, they will murder us in our beds ;"—Mademoiselle Levrier covered all but her face, and lay shivering with fear.

"I do not think they will harm us, Mademoiselle," the child answered, "my father will take care of that."

"What can Sir Evelyn do against so many?"

"I am not afraid."

"Ah! you English; you take things so differently; so—what is the word—with philosophy."

Lucille was only giving half her attention to this conversation, her ears were listening to the sounds going on below; she heard the bolts of the great hall door pulled back, the key turned in the lock, a parley of voices came next, among which she could recognize her father's tones, clear, firm, remonstrant. Then came the sound of footsteps throughout the Abbey, the tread of men, strong, disciplined, the clank of arms; mingled with this was the indication of a household awakening, doors opening in passages, servants calling to one another. Lucille could hear Clarkson's voice dominating the rest, giving orders, the purport of which, however, failed to reach her.

Mademoiselle Levrier had quieted down, moaning a little every now and again as if in pain, but saying no articulate words.

After some minutes the door of their chamber opened; a burly man, in a plain riding dress, with boots to his thighs, carrying a lantern in his right hand, filled the doorway; behind him, and over his shoulder, Lucille could see her father's face, weary and anxious.

"Two sleep here, sir," he said, "our only child and her governess; you will not needlessly alarm them?"

"I do not alarm children, but my errand must be accomplished; I am God's servant to carry out this very thing, the crushing of a tyrant's brood."

The words were spoken almost as if the burly man was addressing an assemblage rather than as if expressing the natural language of his own heart. As he said the words he held up the lantern to survey the apartment; in doing so he showed his own features very clearly, at any rate to Lucille, who was gazing at him with wide-open eyes; Made-moiselle had hidden her face altogether, only her black hair showing on the pillow.

A broad forehead, wide rather than high, lines over the eyes, which were full and yet piercing, strong aquiline nose, a massive chin, the face conveyed strength, honesty, intellectual power, the domination of a personality rare in the history of men.

"You give me your word, Sir Evelyn Lee, that there is no one concealed under those beds—and I look no further."

"My oath and honour on it, sir; he whom you seek is not in this room, nor is he within these walls."

"Your tone rings true, sir, but in that case very precise information from a trustworthy source has to be discredited."

"What I say is true."

"I am inclined to believe you, perhaps against my better judgment; but, mark you! if it is false, and proves so, the ruin of this house will be great, like unto that built on the sand in Holy Writ."

"I am content to abide by that, sir."

For a moment the man with the lantern bent his gaze on Lucille's upturned face.

"Be not afraid, child," he said, "we are righteous men, and not against the inoffensive and the harmless; sleep in peace with a quiet conscience."

He seemed to give her a kind of benediction, then swung round with the light, and closed the door behind him.

A few minutes later the great hall door shut with a bang.

On the morrow Lucille knew that her visitor of the night had been Master Cromwell, himself.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

GENERAL MONK'S AIDE-DE-CAMP

“Do you know this country, Robert?”

The speaker was a tall, broad man with slightly bowed shoulders, grizzled moustache and hair, under his wig, which was pushed back from his ample forehead, grey eyes, deep and steady, difficult to meet with a lie or a subterfuge, a mouth which suggested strength and caution, lips a little thin as if the owner of them could be hard, perhaps on occasion cruel; yet the whole would be dominated by the balanced mind at the back of those grey eyes. He was dressed in a handsome uniform of black velvet with a large white collar. The environment in which he was sitting hardly seemed appropriate to the man and his evident position; it was the kitchen of a farmhouse. Above the wide hearth hung several hams, flitches of bacon smoking to the requisite flavour in the column shot up by the wood and peat fire in the open hearth beneath. By his side was a deal table, on which lay

foolscap, two or three quill pens, and an ink-horn ; under his left elbow was a roughly-executed map of Middle England. He was sitting round, not facing the table, with his legs stretched out as if relaxing after some hours in the saddle.

Facing this remarkable man, with his back to the chimney-stack, was the person to whom he had addressed the question, Captain Robert Darcy, a second son of Sir William Darcy, of Elberfield, at this time a young soldier of twenty-two years of age, attached as secretary and aide-de-camp to the man sitting at the table.

Robert Darcy had few equals, no superior, in the army to which he belonged ; perhaps even throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles ; tall and finely-shaped, aristocratic-looking rather than handsome, there was something about his demeanour and bearing which affected all with whom he was brought into contact ; a fine swordsman, a consummate rider, quick to conceive, bold to execute, General Monk, Commander-in-Chief of the Army in Scotland, had early signalled out Cornet Darcy for special recognition and service ; rapidly promoted to the rank of captain, Monk had attached him to his own particular use. This was prior to the time before an extraordinary succession of events ended in making the Commander-in-Chief of the Scots Army arbiter of the destinies of England.

Oliver Cromwell had passed to his rest, leaving

behind a shadowy sceptre to the nerveless grasp of his son Richard. For five months the latter had carried on the semblance of government; then he retired into private life. The nation looked on sullenly; the Army encamped at Blackheath, and Hounslow overawed the metropolis; Generals like Lambert and Harrison and Desborough aspired to occupy the place Cromwell had won for himself; but each of them lacked just that one quality which had signalled out the great Protector from his fellows. Parliament was in abeyance; the nobles and country gentry remained in their seats awaiting the issue of events with apprehension, and at the same time with subdued hopes. Thousands of hearts turned towards that young man, the heir of a kingly name, the rightful owner, as they considered, of a royal throne, who, when this story opened, found harbourage in the concealed chamber of the Sanctuary of Grangeland Abbey.

Charles Stuart! when would he come into his own again; who would bring him back to a nation eager for peace, and a settled government? Men held their breaths, and waited; for an unconquerable army, the heroes of a hundred fights, waged and won, barred the way; these Puritan soldiers had nothing to gain, nothing to hope, all to lose, from a Stuart.

Then had come a streak of light across the horizon of the nation. The man who had been forgotten, overlooked, hardly considered at all, yet of a great-

ness unequalled now that Cromwell had gone, suddenly asserted himself.

George Monk was at the head of an army of eight thousand men, every one a trained and veteran soldier, devoted to their General, loyal to one another. Such a force might not be sufficient to conquer a great nation, but it was the one united power, the one solid body, among a number of conflicting units, jealous of each other, lacking cohesion and leadership.

General Monk, at the head of his eight thousand men, marched across the Border and proceeded towards London. What would he do? what did he propose? would he declare for a Parliament? could he overcome the opposition of the Army encamped near the metropolis? could he bring back, would he, if he could, Charles Stuart?

These were the questions which were being asked throughout the length and breadth of the land, weary and watchful.

Monk had now reached the centre of England, and had made his personal head-quarters in a farmhouse between Trent and Avon. He had summoned Darcy into his presence; the latter had but just come in, when General Monk questioned him as to his knowledge of that part of the country.

"No, General, not very well, I am afraid," Darcy replied; "I was here when quite a boy, but I have not visited the neighbourhood since."

"What brought you here, Robert?"

"My mother has connections at Grangeland Abbey."

General Monk raised his eyebrows, betokening surprise. "That is curious," he said to himself *sotto voce*, but sufficiently aloud to reach his hearer; "I am thinking of going to the Abbey, myself; I knew Sir Evelyn Lee years ago, and have ever had a high opinion of his judgment and character."

"He struck me much, sir, as a small boy, I remember; I was not a little afraid of him."

"Were you ever afraid of any one?"

Captain Darcy smiled, when he did so his face lighted up; as a rule his expression was sombre, almost sad for so young a man, perhaps due to an experience of war commenced at an early age and under conditions not favourable to complete satisfaction with the issue whatever it might be. A soldier doubtful of his cause, unless he is a mercenary, is not to be envied; to be happy he must feel himself in the right.

"I am afraid of you, sir," he replied.

"That is as it should be; although I have not recognized any expression of such feeling! However, I want you to ride to Grangeland Abbey,"—he turned and indicated the direction in the map on the table—"give my best respects to Sir Evelyn Lee, and say I should like to lie two nights under his roof, if the proposal meets with his approval."

"Yes, sir; when shall I start?"

"With the dawn, on the morrow; you can take as many men with you as you choose, the district is not without lawless characters since General Lambert marched in this direction."

"I have no fear, sir, that with my body-servant, Corporal Longstaffe, I shall win through with your message."

"Very well; you can remain to-morrow night at the Abbey; I shall expect you by midday on Thursday."

Robert Darcy bowed, and went out.

As far as his eye could see camp fires lighted every vantage-point, twinkling like glow-worms in the distance, giving out ruddy flames nearer to the General's quarters. Men were busy cooking their evening meal; the officers were billeted in the cottages surrounding the farmstead. Captain Darcy had a room assigned him under the same roof as General Monk, himself. A powder of snow lay upon the ground, the sun had just set, the twilight of winter was on the scene, about to yield itself to the white mist of oncoming night.

Darcy turned his footsteps in the direction of the stables; the farmer was a noted horse-breeder; he owned a long range of loose-boxes, stabling, and coachhouses. This accommodation was of service to the mounted troops of the General. Issuing from the open door of one of these outbuildings came a

man bearing an empty bucket, which he was about to fill with water, at a pump in the yard ; his shirt-sleeves were turned up, his arms bare ; spare and short, he hardly looked the man of strength, resolution, and hardihood which those well acquainted with him knew him to be ; a wizened face, small twinkling eyes, a skin so weatherbeaten that its original colouring was long forgotten, and would now be hard to determine as to both hue and texture.

He saluted the Captain with his disengaged hand.

"You must have the horses ready by eight o'clock to-morrow, I want you to ride with me ; give them a good feed before we start."

"Yes, Captain."

"We are to go on the General's errand ; the country, he tells me, has a sprinkling of men who may wish to stop us ; he suggested taking two or three troopers."

"We shall do just as well without them, sir."

"So I told him."

"If the crows are hungry, hereabouts, there is sufficient flesh on our bones to feed them."

"I don't know about you, Longstaffe !"

The man looked down at his skinny arms and laughed : "Perhaps you are right, sir ; I do not think we shall come to it !"

"Neither do I ; we have only to keep our eyes open, and our weapons ready."

"I will answer for both, Captain."

"Very well, I am quite satisfied, but I thought it better to tell you what General Monk said."

"Thank you, sir. As long as your risk is mine I am quite content to run it; if we go by ourselves it is only a case of a gentleman and his servant, if we take a file of men with us it's an expedition, and some one would begin to ask questions before we had been out an hour."

"That is the way it occurred to me, Longstaffe. Call me at 7.30 to-morrow."

"Yes, sir."

"Have breakfast ready for both of us."

Longstaffe saluted as Darcy turned back towards his quarters.

He ascended to his room under the eaves. A bright fire, recently lighted, greeted him. He took off his gauntlets and threw them on to a wooden chair; then he sat on another, and stretched out his feet to the blaze. Through the wall he could hear the sound of men talking, they were the commissioners sent by the provisional parliament from London, nominally to advise with General Monk, really to spy out his movements.

It was a day of fear, of anxiety, of treachery.

Darcy sat thinking for the best part of an hour; he pictured his journey on the morrow; his recollection of the country proved very indistinct when he sought to bring it before his mind's eye; he had been but a lad of seven or eight when his mother

brought him with her to the Abbey. Sir Evelyn and Lady Lee had just returned from their estates in Picardy, with them was a baby, barely a year old ; he remembered the child, she had stirred his boyish curiosity, as he had never been in close contact with an infant before. Fifteen years had passed since then ; now he was a man, older than his years, experienced in camp and battle-field, a soldier, schooled in the harsh lessons of actual warfare. Of late he had heard little of his connections at the Abbey ; some whisper had reached him of failing health on the part of Sir Evelyn Lee ; then of the death of Lady Marjorie. He wondered whether the child had lived ; if so she must now be maturing towards womanhood. It was a curious circumstance that he, a connection of the family although not very near, should have been selected as General Monk's representative to bear his message.

Presently supper was served by the farmer's daughter, who divided with her mother the waiting on the guests who had taken summary possession of their home.

"I shall want breakfast at dawn to-morrow," Captain Darcy said, "my man will serve me."

"Thank you, sir, I shall be busy with the cows."

An hour later Darcy retired to rest ; the troops had had a long march and he was somewhat weary. Through the wall still came the strife of tongues ; "They seem to be holding a debate," he said to him-

self, with a smile, "the General is not likely to assist them much in arriving at any conclusions they may form ; he is far too wise for that."

General Monk was going to the Abbey in pursuance of a policy which had actuated him throughout a march, perhaps the most memorable and important in the whole history of England ; he was gathering the opinions of the country, especially of those best qualified to give them ; of these Sir Evelyn Lee was one ; he recognized perfectly that not the blatant Parliamentarians, not the fanatics of the Army, represented the true voice of the land ; it was rather to be found among those who, standing aside from the strife which embittered parties, looked with loyal hearts to the dawn of a brighter and more settled day. Monk himself said nothing, he inspired confidence by his very silence ; he was a well of deep water, a reserve of strength, a man of action, waiting until the time came to put forth that power which every one who came in contact with him recognized as latent under his marvellous quietude.

CHAPTER II

EN ROUTE

SIMON LONGSTAFFE laid a light touch on his master's shoulder; he had been moving about the room before arousing him with that silent, cat-like tread which some servants have by instinct—especially men—and others never acquire.

A fire was burning in the grate, breakfast was laid on a square table between the couch and the fireplace, on a skewer a rasher of bacon was frizzling near to the flame, which a block of dry wood was sending forth, as it blazed merrily; it was a campaigner's meal in preparation.

Darcy roused immediately.

"What sort of day, Longstaffe?"

"Fine and bright, sir, with the sun getting up late, the mist in the valleys."

"That will do; I hope the horses are fit?"

"Fit as a fiddle, Captain; I gave them a good meal before coming to your room, plenty of oats, and a drink of warm mash."

While Longstaffe was answering these questions,

his master had tumbled out of bed. By the time the rasher was cooked he was ready to do it justice.

Ten minutes later he sent Longstaffe out for the horses.

They came up to the door of the farmhouse with a clatter of hoofs, tossing of heads, occasionally gazing straight in front of them, then bucking slightly; the exhilaration of the morning filling them with that fine nervousness which every true horseman loves.

Darcy's steed, Moonlight, was brown, almost black; his servant rode a flea-bitten grey; both animals were capable of performing a long day's route without evidence of fatigue. Darcy looked Moonlight over, stroked her neck, whispered in her ear, and pulled the lock of hair which came down almost to her eyes. Moonlight turned round, arching her beautiful neck, opening her mouth and showing her teeth.

The farm-servants were already astir with a good part of their morning work done, but the soldiers were only just rousing, some of them making their way to the stream which ran the whole length of the valley, in the centre of which were the buildings General Monk had chosen for his head-quarters.

A white frost lay on the roads, its rime picking out the grass ridges, and making them gleam in the first rays of the sun as if a million diamonds had been scattered broadcast on the meadows, during the night.

It was an exhilarating morning; Darcy felt its influence as he flung himself into the saddle. Always quiet and self-contained, on that morning he was conscious of an unusual sense of excitement, a feeling of adventure, as if he were some knight-errant, entering upon a strange world, which promised a trial of skill, to put his mettle to the test. He wondered to himself what it was which was thus stirring in his veins. Was it due to the General's words on the previous day in reference to the condition of the country; was it the intoxication of the crisp frost-laden air meeting the sun's kiss; or was it something as yet unknown which lay hidden in the immediate future?

Closely attended by Simon Longstaffe, Darcy put his horse to the canter, and passed rapidly through the double files of tents. His attention was taken up at the beginning with the necessary guidance of Moonlight; parts of the track were slippery with ice, the sides near to the hedgerows where the grass grew thickly were much easier for the animals.

As the day opened out, and the sun's power increased, the going became more difficult; their speed was necessarily slow. After they had left the confines of the camp behind them, the country was sparsely inhabited; here and there was a farmstead, nestling among gentle hills, with its cluster of cottages. They had traversed half-a-dozen miles before they came to an inn; it stood at the junction of three cross-roads; as they pulled up an ostler

came to the heads of the horses. Darcy questioned him about the road, flung him a coin, then rode on.

At midday they halted in a small township; in the market square the sign of the White Horse invited travellers to alight and refresh themselves.

"We will dine here, Longstaffe," Captain Darcy said; "see to the horses, and then look after yourself."

"Yes, sir."

The host of the White Horse came forward for orders, dressed with a long white apron and a girdle round his middle, from which depended a skewer, a bunch of keys, and a corkscrew.

"What will your honour be pleased to take?"

"Anything you have ready."

The innkeeper enumerated pasties and cold joints.

Darcy ordered what he required.

"You have come from the Army, sir, by the look?" the landlord ventured.

"Yes, I left head-quarters this morning." Darcy saw no reason for disguising the truth.

"There has been a lot of talk in the tap-room about your General, sir, during the last few nights." The landlord was waiting at the table as he spoke.

Darcy did not reply; like his master he could be reticent on occasion.

"These are bad times, sir," the landlord went on, not discouraged by the silence; "not much trade, and plenty of lawless people about."

"So I have heard," Captain Darcy responded.

"Ah! we should like to see the good old times back again."

"The days of Oliver?"

"Aye, or earlier still, when a king was sitting in London with the Houses of Parliament round him; that's what the likes of us want to see again; the coaches of the nobles on the road calling at the White Horse as they go up and down; the ladies taken up to see the Queen to make their curtesy to Her Majesty. I have known when every room in this house was full, and every stall in the yard had a horse with a groom to mind it. If your General can make those days come back again every man in the countryside will give him blessing."

"You will be able to tell him so yourself, landlord; he is probably coming this way."

The host swelled out his chest: "I will speak up to him; 'Honest John' some folk call me; John Sparrow is my name, sir, Honest John always says straight what is at the back of his mind."

"It is a dangerous gift, sometimes," the Captain commented.

"Oh! well, sir, I have an eye to my guests, and I know what they want."

"So you say what they want, eh, Master Sparrow? they may well call you Honest John," Darcy smiled grimly. "How far may it be from here to Grangeland Abbey?" he then inquired.

"Some six miles, sir ; good road for the first three, then a bit rough until you come to Sir Evelyn Lee's property ; he's a fine gentleman, sir, but a bit broken of late months since he lost his wife. It ought to be a good day for him," the landlord continued, "if some one comes into his own again, if all that is said be true."

"Which is very rarely the case," Darcy put in.

"I think this is pretty near the mark, anyway ; there is a rumour, hereabouts, that Sir Evelyn Lee rowed across the Avon one dark night with a guest on board that some folk would like to have seen had the light been better, or their eyes more spry."

"Did Sir Evelyn tell you that ?" Darcy inquired.

"Not he, sir ; but a poaching chap, who comes here with game now and again, told how he lay in a ditch while the boat touched the shore, and two passengers found horses waiting for them under some trees. I heard from another source that there had been a hue-and-cry through the Abbey grounds, and the house itself, after a distinguished visitor who, strange to say, was not there to receive a call ; I put two and two together, sir, and leave it for what it is worth."

"I should not tell that story to every one, my friend," the Captain advised, as he rose from the table.

"A few months ago, sir, I would not have breathed it to a soul, but now times are changed ; we drink a

health across the water-bottle every night in the tap-room, no one gainsaying it."

Robert Darcy paid his reckoning with a smile; Honest John knew how to charge, doubtless the few guests had to compensate for the lack of the many.

As he rode away he wondered. Had mine host of the White Horse suggested another reason for the coming of General Monk to Grangeland Abbey! The Commander-in-Chief of what had once been the Scots Army, now the Army of occupation, had the peculiar faculty for obtaining information which sometimes goes with extreme reticence on the part of the recipient. Monk, who confided his opinions to none, who heard everything and said nothing, had his ears ever open to receive facts which might be of use. His aide-de-camp was well aware of this characteristic; he could not help fancying that something of this story of the inn-keeper had filtered through to General Monk's intelligence department; that he was coming to ascertain for himself.

The January day was at its best, as the two riders made their way towards Grangeland Abbey by the route indicated to them at the inn they had left.

After a while farmsteads became more plentiful; the blue smoke from chimney-stacks made itself apparent in the clear, crisp air against the skyline. Another half-hour would see them entering the park of the Abbey, which Darcy remembered to be ex-

tensive, one of the few recollections which held their ground from his childhood's visit.

They had now reached the part of the road where travelling was not favourable to the horses, and proceeded almost at walking pace.

Robert Darcy pulled up, saying: "What was that?" Moonlight, the more sensitive animal of the two, had pricked her ears, and was facing round towards a cross-road which cut the one they were traversing at right angles. Some coarse laughter reached them, followed by the sound of blows as if on a leathern jerkin. It seemed strange to hear these sounds as not a person was in view.

"We will find out what these jokers are busy about," Darcy remarked, turning his horse in the direction from which the sounds proceeded. Longstaffe was riding at his saddle-bow. "You can await me here," his master directed.

"Yes, sir."

Three minutes' riding sufficed to turn the corner of the cross-road, and bring Darcy into view of the space which lay beyond. The sight which met his eyes astonished him; on the top of a small knoll was an elm; lashed to the trunk of it a middle-aged man faced the tree with his back to the road. His bullet-shaped head and short-cropped hair were uncovered. A gentleman dressed in the height of fashion sat on horseback, looking on with contemptuous gaze; two sturdy lackeys were engaged in chastising the un-

fortunate victim, with an occasional instruction of "Speak out, man, and save your skin."

Not a word, not a cry came from the man thus addressed; fresh blows followed his silence.

Darcy pricked up Moonlight with a touch of his spurred heel and brought himself face to face with the man on horseback. The latter was singularly handsome, and of a deportment which conveyed rank and breeding. He stared insolently at Darcy, scenting interference.

Some distance away, on a hillside, were the low buildings of a fairly extensive farmhouse, the windows of which gleamed as the sunlight fell across them.

The servants, hearing the sound of horses' feet on the road, had turned and looked at their master for fresh instructions; the leather of the victim's jacket showed signs of the punishment he was receiving.

"May I ask, sir, the meaning of this scene?" Darcy inquired.

The stranger lifted his head haughtily: "My servants seem to think this man worthy of chastisement. By the Rood! I am inclined to agree with them."

"He has doubtless done some wrong?"—as Darcy put the question he glanced at the man who was bound to the tree. The tense attitude, which he had assumed before, had relaxed, now that the blows had ceased; he hung, as it were, supported by the cords

which bound him, as if suffering physical pain and exhaustion. Although not an old man, his hair was grey, which, together with his obvious suffering, moved Captain Darcy's compassion; he was the more determined to have an explanation.

"You can see the sort of rascal he is by the look of him; one of Oliver's close-cropped knaves that harried this country and made it uninhabitable for decent men; we bade him damn his master, and say God save the King; he declined to do either, and my servants have been teaching him a little lesson, which may be of service when His Majesty comes into his own again."

"Do you mean to tell me," Darcy demanded, "that for no other cause you have thus maltreated a man on the highway, who has as much right to it as you and I?"

"Maltreated!" the other echoed, "if you call that maltreating there will be another by the side of him ere many seconds are passed."

CHAPTER III

A DUEL ON HORSEBACK

FORTUNE has an ironical way with her ; she sports sometimes with human life and destiny ; she takes it, as the waves a piece of flotsam, as the winds a feather, and carries it where she has a mind.

Sometimes we look back over the past and see a point where a deviation occurred which affected all that followed upon it, a hinge in the great door, passing through which existence took on a new aspect ; yet when we came to that point of deviation its importance was all unsuspected, the fact that it was a hinge unknown.

Robert Darcy at this moment realized grave issues, saw underlying truths, but, nevertheless, missed much which became clear to him in the lurid light cast upon it afterwards. What he felt at this moment had not to do with his own personal fortunes, but with the future of his country, which he loved with a passionate devotion hidden under a seemingly cold exterior. England was in the maelstrom of change ; she had been through crises which

had strained her to the utmost, taxing all her strength, a very crucible in which the finest metals were dissolved into their elements. Civil war had raged from John o' Groats to Land's End; blood had flowed like water, not in defence of a common patriotism, not to drive back the alien from our shores, but brother ranged against brother. The King had expiated the mistakes of a generation on the scaffold. Then had come the iron rule of one dominant mind, not born to high estate, but achieving it by the force of his own will and character. The three kingdoms had surrendered themselves to a military despotism; they were under the heel of a conqueror, and that conqueror made his power felt in every township and hamlet, in rectory, farmhouse, and cottage throughout the whole land. Cromwell was feared abroad as no Englishman had ever been feared before; the dread of him, the power of his name was even greater at home. Where there is fear there can never be liberty; a nation of free men was in bondage; learning, it was to be hoped, such lessons as the prison-house can teach.

Robert Darcy, and his master, General George Monk, were of those who hoped that salutary lessons had been learnt; that the reckless spirit, the selfish arrogance which had marked the governing class in the days of the Stuart kings had yielded place during those years of adversity to a wiser instinct of moderation. On the other hand, it was anticipated that the

intense asceticism of the Puritan had spent its force; reaction might be expected towards a larger charity, a wider and wiser outlook.

Cromwell was dead, the future was in the lap of the gods. A small thing, the will of one man, a change of sentiment on the part of the people, might bring about results of immediate and yet permanent character.

Robert Darcy had been thinking these things as a greater than he had thought them, when he started on his errand for Grangeland Abbey. Now there had come to him a rude awakening; before his eyes was enacted an isolated wrong, but the fear was that it was symptomatic; here was a man, about thirty years of age, old enough to have memories, young enough to have a future, typical of a class, the class which if the King were brought back again would hold the destinies of the nation in their hands; this handsomely-dressed stranger, patrician to his fingertips, had taken the first opportunity to display an animus which had already proved the ground of bitter strife, which had made of the fair edifice of the greatest country on the face of the earth a ruin.

Darcy's heart sank as his blood boiled. At any rate his should be the hand which redressed this wrong.

Moonlight had been champing her bit impatiently, pawing with her right fore-foot until the sparks flew out under her hoof from the frosted ground. With

a quick movement of heel and bridle Darcy brought her to the side of the road. In a flash he had drawn his sword, and brought it down smartly on the rope which bound the victim to the tree ; it severed instantly under the touch of the fine steel. The man, thus freed, sat down heavily on the rough grass by the side of the road ; his veins had stagnated during those minutes of strained position. He looked at his deliverer from under shaggy brows, not exactly gratefully, but with a certain suspicion, as if wondering if he was to be the victim of some fresh outrage from a different quarter. The eyes under the pent-house of his brow were true enough, honest, if somewhat hard ; he, too, was a type, like the Cavalier, gazing in hot astonishment at an act of interference, which had taken him by surprise.

The two lackeys half drew their hangers, ready to fall upon the new arrival at a sign from their master, but the latter had already freed his blade from its sheath, and made it glitter in the light of the setting sun.

"To me, sir," he cried fiercely, "guard yourself ! You shall pay for daring to cross my path !"

Darcy was nothing loath ; beneath that calm exterior there lurked hidden fires, strength, resolution, righteous anger ; he resented this man's acts, he regarded them as the height of folly, always an annoyance to the wise ; they were the doings of a bully, sheltering under the predominance of numbers,

three against one, a bully none the less that he had a patrician appearance, a noble bearing.

The two swords clashed in mid-air, the sparks flew. Darcy had a double disadvantage: Moonlight was standing on lower ground, the stranger having the choice of position, the light, too, was in Darcy's eyes, the sun, setting red, striking just over the tops of the hedgerows into the face of the horseman; but Monk's aide-de-camp was a soldier who had seen real fighting from the days he had been a mere stripling; his first thought was to parry the attack rather than make his own good, then manœuvre into a more favourable position. He backed Moonlight slowly, sideways, while more by instinct than by actual sight he met the blade of his antagonist at every point. The latter thought he was retreating, trying to make good his escape, and so pressed on, doubly raining blow on blow. The sound they made broke the stillness of the quiet afternoon, as the laughter of the lackeys had done before.

Longstaffe heard it, and galloped to see what had befallen. He sat transfixed with astonishment when he, too, rounded the corner which his master had passed a short time previously. He smiled; no doubt of the issue disturbed his confidence; there was not a trick of fence, French, Italian, or English, which Darcy had not studied with that determination to master it which was a part of his very nature; it was improbable that this stranger had had anything

like the same experience. The servants looked on with their mouths open: they had not moved, except to back a little out of the way, since the encounter began; they, too, no doubt, trusted in the prowess of their champion; their horses, tethered to a fir-sapling some twenty yards up the track, stretching their necks to reach something which tempted them in the hedgerows, completing the picture although not of it.

Just as Darcy arrived at the spot which he had marked out which brought him level with the road his opponent occupied at the beginning, the sword of the latter found its way through his defence, pricking him between the breast and the left arm. Darcy's mail, which he wore under his surtout, turned off the edge of the blow, but some blood came from the forearm, which was unprotected.

"Ha! first pink, by Jupiter!" the stranger cried gleefully.

Captain Darcy made no answer save to alter his style of attack. He tried a certain device which he had learnt from a French *maître d'armes* attached to the Scots Army, and at the same time increased the rapidity of his blows. Now it was his adversary's turn to give back.

Step by step the horse he was riding, answering to some touch on the part of his master, gave way foot by foot, and yard by yard, until at length the beast had gone against the bank, his hind-feet slid from

under him, his haunches rested on the ground. The rider, his attention taken up with his horse's sudden plight, lost guard for a single instant ; he was at Darcy's mercy. The latter gave him the point of his weapon, but only sufficiently to touch and graze his skin over the heart ; then with consummate horsemanship he reined back Moonlight into the middle of the highway, affording his adversary opportunity to recover himself.

To some men this generous conduct would have meant corresponding appreciation, a sense of gratitude, for the courtesy and generosity displayed ; but the nature of this man with whom Darcy had to deal was different, not fashioned in so fine a mould. His face flushed angrily ; he hated Darcy the more at his moment of obligation than he had done in the supreme height of conflict.

Scoring his steed savagely with his heel, and striking it with the flat of his sword, in a bound he had regained the centre of the road opposite to where Darcy sat, like any equestrian statue.

" You have won, sir, in the first round ; you shall rue the result in the second," he cried.

For the second time Darcy said not a word, but raised his weapon to receive the renewed attack.

It was not destined, however, to occur ; the clatter of horses' feet sounded once more on the road. Both the combatants turned to gaze in the direction from whence the sounds proceeded, each wondering whether

allies were coming up to aid his opponent. Instead, there cantered up a gentleman well on into middle age, a young girl by his side ; the latter was passing fair ; she sat her horse with a grace which evoked the admiration of the onlookers.

A certain air of authority sat well upon the older man's face and mien. He rode straight up to the adversaries, who had instinctively lowered their weapons. The girl had pulled in her mare and was waiting to see what would happen with intense curiosity.

" You will favour me, gentlemen, with an explanation of this scene. I am Sir Evelyn Lee, the owner of the adjoining land, a magistrate and deputy-lieutenant of the county."

Captain Darcy and the unknown both saluted, dipping their swords to Sir Evelyn, then raising their hats to the lady who was with him, obviously his daughter, from the likeness which characterized them both.

Captain Darcy had guessed the identity of the speaker before he announced his name and rank : he had been startled to see the change which had passed over Sir Evelyn since he was last in his company. We instinctively expect other people to remain *in statu quo* although we ourselves have undergone the transformation which the passage of years brings with it. When Robert Darcy saw Sir Evelyn last he was a young man, full of vigour ; now his mous-

tache was white, his face lined, his shoulders bent ; illness and sorrow, the great sorrow of his existence, had produced these effects even more than the years which intervened.

Darcy was the nearer of the two combatants to Sir Evelyn, and had turned Moonlight so as to face him ; he now spoke :

"I am on my way to your house, Sir Evelyn ; you have probably quite forgotten me——"

The baronet scanned his face, but without success.

"I am afraid that is true, sir," he said.

"I am Robert Darcy, your kinsman, sir ; and at the present time acting as aide-de-camp to General Monk ; I come on his errand."

Both the late antagonists had by this time restored their swords to their sheaths. Sir Evelyn brought his horse up alongside and held out his hand, from which he had removed his glove.

"I certainly should not have known you," he remarked. They shook hands.

"I could hardly have expected it, sir, unless you had noticed a likeness to my mother ; I was only a child when you saw me last."

When General Monk's name was mentioned the stranger had shown some interest ; he now approached nearer :

"I understood you to say, sir," he said, "that you are on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief ; I was about to pay him my respects, and have ridden some

distance to do so ; may I inquire where I am likely to find him ?”

“ His head-quarters at present,” Darcy answered coldly, “ are at Feld Green Farm, which lies some sixteen miles from here, a little off the Bosworth road.”

The conversation was suddenly interrupted by a movement on the part of the man, who had been sitting on the ground after Darcy had summarily released him from his position against the tree-trunk ; with the rope still round his middle, he came towards the horsemen. The lackeys took a step forward to stop him, but were not in time ; as is the case with all well-trained servants initiative is not their strong point ; they hesitated to act without orders. The man held up a warning finger to the handsome stranger by whose servants he had been grievously mishandled ; his face was grim, his mouth hard :

“ You think, my lord Duke,” he cried, “ that you can do as you please, the lesson of Nebuchadnezzar was lost on his son, in like manner you have forgotten your father’s fate ; the day will come,” he went on, “ when your pride will be dashed to the ground, laid low, and trampled in the dust ; when you, yourself, beggared, forsaken by your friends, despised by all who know you, will slink away into a hovel and die alone, untended and unwept.”

There was something curiously impressive about

this unexpected utterance, spoken with all the fervour of conviction, with uplifted finger as if God and man were called upon as witnesses of the prophecy.

A cold wind swept up the road and seemed to chill them all to the bone, even the horses rattled their harness; the sun no longer reached the spot where they were collected, having gone so far down towards its setting that the rays failed to penetrate beyond the hedgerows.

Having spoken the man turned round, walked towards the narrow lane, which intercepted the main road in the direction from which Sir Evelyn Lee had come; he disappeared up it before any one made any movement towards stopping him.

'The first to break the silence was Sir Evelyn Lee; he accosted the stranger:

"I believe I am not mistaken in thinking that you are His Grace of Buckingham?"

"You are correct, sir."

"I am not yet acquainted with the cause of difference between my young kinsman and Your Grace. If you are both pleased to adjourn to my house I shall be glad to act as arbiter, and trust that I may succeed in healing the breach which has occurred between you."

"I regret that I am not able to avail myself of your offer of hospitality," the Duke responded: "I am anxious to speak to General Monk without delay, and the night comes on. As to this gentleman,"—

he turned towards Darcy—"we shall doubtless meet again; when we do he will find that George Villiers has an excellent memory for a friend—and for a foe." His next words were addressed to his servants: "Get to your horses and follow me." He raised his plumed hat, bowed with an especial inclination towards Mistress Lucille Lee, then reining back his horse for several yards, looking hard at Darcy, as if to fix his features on his memory, he turned and rode away.

Sir Evelyn had taken in the situation with knitted brows.

"I am sorry, kinsman, that you should have had occasion to quarrel with the Duke of Buckingham; he comes of a race which has a reputation not altogether pleasing; they have a capacity for hate, and are not too scrupulous in the means they employ for effecting their ends. What I have heard of this young man tallies with the record of his House; if His Majesty, whom God protect, comes into his own again, Buckingham will in all probability be of those nearest to his person; you have your future to be hindered or helped, your life to be made or marred."

"I thank you, Sir Evelyn, but I am not afraid; what I did this afternoon I should essay again under similar circumstances; I do not fear but that God will protect the right."

Lucille was looking at the speaker. His words, quietly spoken, impressed her much; they sank deep into her memory, returning after a lapse of years.

CHAPTER IV

A FAINT BY THE WAYSIDE

THE Duke of Buckingham and his servants had galloped away by the time Sir Evelyn Lee had made a formal introduction of Captain Darcy to his daughter. Then their party turned in the direction the Duke had already followed, which led back again into the high-road Darcy had quitted, attracted by the sounds he had heard. Sir Evelyn Lee and his daughter were merely engaged in their usual afternoon ride when the incident interrupted their progress.

Reaching the high-road, they found it empty, the Duke having made good use of his start. They now began riding slowly in the direction of the Abbey; Robert Darcy was between father and daughter; Sir Evelyn was speaking, anticipating a sharp frost after the sunset. Darcy could not understand what had come over himself, the words spoken by Sir Evelyn sounded as if uttered at some distance; he was confused, finding it difficult to take in what was said, impossible to answer; he swayed in his saddle. Lucille noticed it.

"Mind! father, there is something the matter with Captain Darcy."

Sir Evelyn turned in his saddle, and saw at once the greyness which had come over his kinsman's face. He dropped the reins on his horse's neck, and stretched out his hand, taking Darcy by the arm. If he had not done so the latter would have fallen. The touch made Darcy wincc. Sir Evelyn felt the arm he was grasping sticky under his touch; the sleeve was saturated with blood.

"You are wounded," he said, "why did you not say so?"

"A scratch," the aide-de-camp murmured, his lips almost refusing to perform their office.

Sir Evelyn dismounted and helped Darcy to do the same. Longstaffe, who was riding a few paces behind, at once came up. The horses of the two soldiers were trained to stand at a word; Lucille took the bridle of her father's mount, and led it on a few paces; Sir Evelyn and Longstaffe assisted Darcy to the side of the road, where he rested against the bank, at the top of which was a quick-set hedge.

"I ought to have remembered he was pricked, sir," Longstaffe commented, "but I forgot it, when the fight began again; it was done at the beginning, when the light was in my master's eyes; no one ever got past his defence before;" he was jealous for his master's reputation as a swordsman.

While Longstaffe was speaking he had turned back the sleeve of Captain Darcy's doublet, exposing the white sinewy arm, stained now on the under-side with blood, which still trickled freely from an incised wound.

"That flow must be stopped at once," Sir Evelyn remarked; "a vein must have been severed."

Lucille was looking on, white and anxious, from her seat on horseback; she, too, felt a little faint from sympathy; it was the first time she had seen a wound, and realized what war might mean.

Longstaffe hurried back to his horse, opened a knapsack which was hanging from the crupper at the back of his saddle. He took from it a strip of lint, part of the equipment without which no experienced soldier moved on the march. Running back, he began deftly to bind his master's fore-arm.

Darcy became still whiter under the process, and finally fainted. Lucille, with a little cry, turned the horses round in the direction of the wounded man.

"Father! he is not dying, is he?" she exclaimed, intense anxiety in her tones.

"Oh no, my dear; he has fainted through loss of blood."

Longstaffe was engaged in securing the bandage he had wound tightly over the wound. "There is some brandy in my master's haversack," he said, "if the young lady could bring it."

Sir Evelyn's arm was under Darcy's neck, keeping

him in his position, on the sloping bank ; he could not, therefore, be spared to do this errand.

Lucille slid down from her mare at the suggestion, led the horses up to a gate which was near, leading into a field ; she threw the reins of her own and her father's steed over the tops of the gate-posts ; then she hurried back to Captain Darcy's horse, which was standing quite still in the centre of the road, moving her ears backwards and forwards as if she were an equine sentinel alert for any strange sound that might come. With trembling fingers she managed to undo the strap, and disclose the contents of the haversack ; it contained Darcy's kit for the journey ; the girl was shy and uncomfortable as she moved the things on one side to find the flask lying below them. When she found it, she brought it to the side of the wounded man.

" Give him a little, Lucille," Sir Evelyn directed.

She knelt down and held the brandy to his mouth, but his teeth were set ; she could not get the opening of the flask into his mouth. Dipping her finger in the spirit, at her father's suggestion, she touched Robert's lips and the inside of his nostrils.

After a second or two his tongue came out and took up the moisture from his under-lip. 'Lucille was quick to take advantage of it, dropping some more of the potent spirit on his tongue. He coughed, swallowed, then opened his eyes ; they were wild and glassy.

"Now a little more," Sir Evelyn directed.

This time Darcy swallowed a little ; his eyes became more natural, they rested on Lucille's face, which was very close to his, as she knelt on the bank. He was in a world of dreams, not knowing what was real, what imaginary ; this beautiful face so close, passing fair, with tender solicitude in the blue eyes ; was it that of some visitor from another world, some angel of light, come to him in his hour of weakness and need ?

"Try and take a little more," she coaxed.

The words were human, the voice a girl's. He was returning to earth again, and perhaps not altogether sorry that his ministrant was flesh and blood like himself. He made a mental effort, and through it a physical one, doing as he was bid.

Full consciousness came back to him, and with it—will-power. He raised his head from Sir Evelyn's arm.

"How stupid of me ! I have never fainted before, and this from a scratch, when I have been wounded several times without ever losing consciousness."

"A scratch, when it involves losing as much blood as you have just done, is very likely to have this result," Sir Evelyn answered.

Lucille had risen to her feet, and was standing back, the flask still in her hands.

"I can get up now," Darcy declared. The two

men assisted him to rise. Longstaffe brought him his hat and wig, which had fallen off.

"I think a little more of your medicine, Mistress Lucille, would do me good rather than harm."

"It was your own medicine, Cousin, I only brought it to you."

Robert smiled : "Do you know I was so foolish I half fancied you were an angel, I am not sure even now that I was wrong; at any rate, you are an angel to me."

"I did but little, and only what I was bidden."

"I am afraid I frightened you."

"You did, a little; I had never seen a man faint from a wound, and I was not sure——" she broke off.

Darcy had taken the flask from her hand. He bent and touched her fingers with his lips, then he took a draught from it.

"I shall ever remember your succour with gratitude," he said, "when we are far one from another."

"Nay, sir, you will have other things to think about."

"Nothing I shall treasure more."

Lucille flushed at the words; something told her that these were not mere compliments, that the lips which spoke them were not in the habit of saying pretty nothings to Court ladies. Before her was a soldier blunt and straightforward.

The words found an echo in her heart, stirring

her after a fashion she had never experienced before. Lucille wondered why.

Darcy was helped on to his horse; his man, Corporal Longstaffe, walked by his side, holding the rein of his own grey in the crook of his left arm, while his right hand rested on his master's saddle.

Darcy was giddy, but managed, with the instinct of a horseman, to keep his seat. Their progress was slow, and they were all not a little thankful when the gates of the park opened to admit them, and they were within measurable distance of home.

On arriving at the Abbey, Darcy betook himself at once to bed in the great spare room which was made ready for him, under the direction of Mistress Soulsby, Sir Evelyn Lee's housekeeper. A surgeon was sent for who resided in a township some three miles from the Abbey; his one idea was bleeding as a remedy for all serious illnesses, with the application afterwards of the limited drugs in his own modest dispensary. Darcy had already lost more blood than was good for him, and the treatment only served to weaken him further. During the night he was in a high fever, and although this had passed by the morning he was reduced to a condition which obviously made movement impossible for some little time.

Longstaffe, having satisfied himself that his master was in no immediate danger, started back early with a note from Sir Evelyn Lee to General Monk setting

forth Captain Darcy's condition, and offering the General a welcome to the Abbey.

During the next twenty-four hours the house was agog with preparations for the arrival of the distinguished visitor. Of late years no entertaining had been done, a cloud of illness and sorrow having hung over the fortunes of the family; but, indeed, had this not been the case, the result would have been much the same. During the Commonwealth sullen acquiescence in the Government *de facto* was the prevailing attitude of the Cavalier classes; amusements were few, and these indulged in as it were surreptitiously; a brooding dulness reigned over the land, contrasting strangely with the condition of things before the great war, and still more with the exuberance, the abandon, which marked the days of Charles II.

To the Lees the general depression probably mattered less than to the great majority of their own social standing; in any case the preference of both father and daughter was towards a quiet life. Lucille loved her books, her music, her embroidery and needlework; she read poetry in Greek, Latin, Italian and French, and was accomplished with the viol and harpsichord; yet was she no book-worm or mere student; she would ride to hounds with Sir Evelyn and gallop across country with fearless courage; she was mature before her time, mentally and physically; a precocious child, as already seen, she

put on much of the thought and reserve of womanhood while yet a girl in her teens. Some of this effect was produced by the prolonged illness and early passing of her mother, Dame Marjorie Lee, which cast a shadow over her girlhood.

Lucille found herself thinking with pleased anticipation about the more prolonged visit which her kinsman, Captain Robert Darcy, must necessarily pay them, before he would be well enough to return to his duties; his wound, and the ministration which she had been called upon to offer, had bridged the interval which would naturally have been set up, under different conditions, by her maidenly reserve; then, again, the claim of kinsmanship constituted an appeal, and created a bond of union, in the heart of one who had seen practically nothing of any relations other than the very closest.

Lucille always spent at least an hour out of her mornings in the kitchen or still-room; it was her mother's express wish that she should be skilled in all the arts of cookery, preserves, the preparing of condiments, the making of spiced dishes. During the days that followed Robert Darcy's coming to the Abbey Lucille's skill in this department found effective display; it was her hand more often than any one else's which prepared broths and soups, and other light and tempting dishes for the sick-room.

Robert Darcy did not know, of course, the individual source from whence they came, but Lucille

spared no pains to stimulate an appetite, flagging and capricious through illness. Thus apart, the one in a great four-post bed, regaining strength by the latent energy and nervous force within him, and the other, planning and carrying out small services for his benefit, they were brought nearer together ; the girl, at any rate, conscious that she was finding a pleasure and satisfaction in doing for Robert Darcy what lay in her power.

There are few things in life which draw a woman more effectively to the opposite sex than the capacity for service ; a man's need of her is more often than not the measure of a woman's desire to do his will. Instinct from the beginning of human life has constituted this bond of union between the sexes, the one guards and works, the other serves and ministers ; the nearer life comes to this arrangement the happier and more natural it is ; the further it is separated from it the more artificial it grows, and the consequent sense of loss the greater.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL MONK AT THE ABBEY

AT noon on the day but one after Darcy's arrival at the Abbey news was brought by a mounted scout, who had been posted beforehand on a fast horse in the high-road, that General Monk's company was approaching. The groom had taken his stand at a point where several miles could be surveyed, so that his information reached Sir Evelyn Lee in time for him to be at the gates, with three or four principal servants behind him, to receive his distinguished guest.

Half-a-dozen veteran Coldstreamers were in the van, behind them rode the General, himself, with a Commissioner on either hand. Two high officers of the Army succeeded, and behind them, again, a small troop of Lancers.


General Monk shook Sir Evelyn warmly by the hand, and introduced him to Secretary Scot and Robinson, the representatives of Parliament and the Civil Power. Sir Evelyn scanned the General's war-worn face with intense interest, partly aroused by

the past, partly concerned with the future; the greatest man in England, perhaps in the world, was entering the gates of the park; a soldier, without a peer, an honest man who had done great deeds, and from whom greater things still might well be expected. The story had reached Sir Evelyn's ears of the masterly way in which Monk had bent the Scots Army and made it an efficient weapon of his will; how the men who were seeking to undermine his influence had been cashiered and broken by one stupendous act of energy, which had secured every fortress throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, which had welded together the army Monk commanded so that it moved as one man, a perfect machine towards the emancipation of England, or rather of the whole nation. Sir Evelyn had heard of those night marches through the snow, of the heroism General Monk had displayed in bearing all the stress and vicissitudes of a winter advance; his wisdom in meeting unforeseen difficulties, his extraordinary success in overcoming them. This was the immediate past; what lay hidden in the womb of the future? Sir Evelyn, who loved his country, tried to read those calm wise eyes; tried to gather something from the demeanour of the great soldier who rode his big weight-carrier as if it were part and parcel of himself.

How insignificant did those fussy Parliamentarians, with their ill-fitting dignity, who were on either side

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of Monk, show themselves in comparison with the dignity of the man whom they were seeking to lead into perilous places, seeking without avail.

"It is many years since we met, Sir Evelyn, yet it remains in my recollection. I wished to pay my respects to you in person as my Army was lying so near to your property." 

"I am delighted to give you a welcome and only regret that the accommodation at the Abbey is limited and unworthy of so great a guest." Sir Evelyn spoke hat in hand, with a bow of courtesy and respect.

"Accommodation!" Monk quoted. "By the Lord Harry! Lee, if you had seen some of the hovels in which I have lain with those trusted soldiers about me, whom you have just passed, you would not speak of Grangeland Abbey in such terms."

"I have heard a little, General, of what you have endured, and was only apologizing that my house will not easily accommodate all I see this morning."

"Do not be afraid, Sir Evelyn, I recognize the wish of your hospitality, but I assure you that a barn and a few trusses of straw will serve the purpose of any of my soldiers, my own, too, for that matter; these gentlemen might think differently"—he indicated with a sly twinkle the two civilians.

"I hope we shall be able to manage for you all without the help of the barn," Sir Evelyn smiled.

They rode through the park, and so to the

Abbey; Monk himself seemed preoccupied; more than once his eye appeared to travel with a certain curiosity over the well-wooded estate as they passed it by; he said but little as was his wont. Sir Evelyn addressed some remarks to Mr. Secretary Scot and his companion; they took the opportunity, as they did everywhere on that memorable march to London, to declaim against the King and the Royalist party, a topic they seemed unable to avoid. Their host ventured to combat the most severe of their tirade. General Monk said not a word, but occasionally a ghost of a smile displayed itself, Lee thought, round the corners of his strong mouth. Appealed to by Scot or Robinson he answered in monosyllables or sometimes only with a slap of his open hand on the flank of his horse, a repartee which might have meant anything.

So they reached the Abbey; on the top step Mistress Lucille, attended by the housekeeper, and some of the indoor servants, stood to receive her father's visitors.

General Monk kissed her hand after alighting from his horse and mounting the steps of the hall door; the grave dignity and courtesy of the maiden appealed to the old soldier.

"You remind me of your mother," he said.

Tears came into the girl's eyes. "You can say no more, sir, than that," she said.

General Monk took her hand and linked it in his

arm. "Come!" he said, "my first visit must be paid to Robert Darcy, my wounded aide-de-camp; you shall be my guide to his apartment; he did not make a favourable impression on His Grace of Buckingham, who wished me to think every ill of his impertinence, when he did me the honour to visit me a few hours later."

Lucille fired up in Robert Darcy's interest. She had little means of gauging the fact that George Monk never looked at any one through another man's eyes, having the best provided for him by nature, whereby to judge for himself.

"My kinsman interfered with His Grace of Buckingham on behalf of a man who was being maltreated for his opinions, or rather for differing from the Duke; it was Ebenezer Holden, one of my father's farmers; the whole story came to the Abbey this morning; there were three against one, but Captain Darcy did not think of the odds when his righteous anger was stirred." Lucille held her head high, colour in her cheeks, her eyes gleaming.

"It is well to have a champion," General Monk commented, "especially one like you, Mistress Lee; in the Army to which I have the honour to belong we do not think of odds, but only of causes, not of our own safety, but only of rights; Robert Darcy is one of us;" he spoke with the nearest approach to pride, and that impersonal, of which his nature was capable.

Lucille had heard from her father how the man by her side had written to the Commons of England, and had bidden them safeguard the liberties of the Realm, assuring them that he was prepared to support them, if need be, by force of arms against any who were mindful to coerce their just powers. She was proud to feel her hand resting on the arm of this great man; thus they passed together into the apartment in which lay Robert Darcy, who had been warned of the General's coming.

Darcy had a cloak of red flannel, trimmed with ermine, over his shoulders, the colour of the garment contrasted with the whiteness of his face. He saluted the General with feeble hand.

"You were a foolish boy, Darcy, and have run your head against a wall," Monk remarked dryly.

"You would have done the same yourself, sir, under similar circumstances."

"Perhaps, but it would have been none the less foolish; the Duke of Buckingham is minded to remember your interference; he assured me of that, in the interval of according me certain advice and proffering other things which might, or might not, be within his power to bestow."

Darcy did not reply, his brain moved slowly; Monk at the best of times was in the habit of using a form of speech, the interpretation of which might be left to his hearers. Whether calculated or not, his success in veiling his intentions during that

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memorable time has passed into a proverb. The Commissioners of Parliament believed him a loyal servant of the Republic; the nation which longed for a restoration of monarchy acclaimed Monk a King's man; yet both heard his words, finding in them what their preferences demanded.

"You are in proper hands, Robert, and have my permission to remain until your wound is healed and your strength restored."

"Thank you, General; I shall be at the post of duty at the earliest possible moment."

"Then we shall meet again in London." The General accorded him a friendly nod.

Lucille smiled upon Darcy. "There is nothing you want?" she asked.

"Yes, many things." The sick man's eyes rested on the girl's face; it was at that moment he began to conceive an idea, that there might come to him some day a desire for other things than a life of ambition, or the daily round of a soldier.

Lucille looked wondrous sweet and fresh; her figure slim but rounded, her face with its patrician beauty; in her glance that tenderness and sympathy which constitutes the great charm of her sex.

"Anything I can do for you?"

"Not more than you are doing, which is infinitely beyond my deserts."

Lucille shook her head, swept him a small curtesy,

half playful, half formal, by way of farewell, then left the room behind Monk.

A short time after this, dinner was served to the General, the Commissioners, and the officers, Sir Evelyn Lee presiding; Lucille was not at the table.

Later horses were brought round and some of the party rode out. The Commissioners had had enough of riding, and excused themselves on the ground of necessary correspondence.

The greater part of the estate was covered during the hour-and-a-half which followed; it was too cold for slow progress, and there was consequently little opportunity for conversation.

Towards the end of the ride they skirted the bank of the Avon; the river flowed sullenly with dark waters between the snow-lined towing paths on either hand. General Monk looked curiously at the boat-house as he rode by it, half pulling up, then he glanced at his host.

"Yours is a convenient position, Sir Evelyn."

"Yes, the property is well placed, and the river adds to its attractions; that is what my estate in Picardy lacks."

"Just so." After a pause he went on. "If I wished to escape from inconvenient followers I should like to be your friend, Sir Evelyn; this well-wooded country, with its ample cover, and a means of crossing for the last emergency."

Lee did not answer; he wondered how much

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Monk knew; seven years had passed since that episode in the night-time at the Abbey. Reports of various happenings, during some months of wandering, had filtered through from Charles Stuart's environment to Royalist circles in England. What had Monk heard? Sir Evelyn was not as concerned about the answer as he would have been a few months earlier; he was assured in his own mind that no harm would come to him in any circumstances, even if the whole truth were known. In the days of the Protector it would have meant the loss of his estate, and possibly imprisonment for himself.

When they reached the stabling which flanked the Abbey on one side, General Monk said: "You have not shown me everything, Lee."

"To what do you refer, General?"

"I have heard that the ancient chapel of the family lies picturesquely in a wood. I should like to see it."

"We have prayers there daily," Sir Evelyn answered, "I have recently restored the building, and, when weather permits, the family servants and retainers meet there at ten of the clock. Would you be pleased to join us to-morrow?"

Monk knew that this was in accordance with what was going on throughout England; although the parish churches were closed to Church of England clergy, and the pulpits occupied by Presbyterian

ministers, Cromwell had silently acquiesced in family prayers being said by the heads of households, even with the use of the Prayer-book. It was part of his policy to smooth away petty annoyances, and in accordance with the real liberality which lay at the back of his mind.

"I am afraid that I cannot accept your suggestion," Monk said. "Mr Secretary Scot would at once report to his employers that I was tainted with Prelacy, if nothing worse, but I should like to accompany you there now, if you have no objection."

"We shall have to go on foot," Sir Evelyn suggested; he was not altogether eager to fall in with Monk's wishes.

"That will do very well." So saying, the General swung himself down from his horse; two or three soldiers, who had been lounging before the gates of the stabling, ran up and took the steaming animals, saluting as they did so.

Monk intimated to the officers, who had ridden behind throughout the expedition, that their attendance was no longer required, then he turned to follow his host.

Ten minutes' walking brought them to the building, once in ruins, now rendered serviceable for worship. Sir Evelyn unlocked the door with a key he took from a recess close to the porch.

The two men passed into the chapel now fitted up simply, for worship.

Monk scanned the thick walls.

"Those buttresses would stand a siege," he remarked ; "it would take a park of Artillery, at short range, to level them to the ground." As he spoke he struck the wall sharply with his open hand, in its glove. They were standing on the north side, not far from the base of the arch in which the secret spring was hidden.

"It rings hollow, Sir Evelyn ; if I were minded for an investigation I should be inclined to look for it here."

The baronet did not reply ; neither did Monk press his point, but turned round as if satisfied that he had seen all he required.

They went together to the door, which Sir Evelyn locked behind him. Monk looked round, taking in the snow-laden trees standing thick together, the narrow pathway which led up to the building, the seclusion in which it was placed ; he stood without moving, very thoughtful, his brow knitted, as if piecing together what he had heard, and what he saw.

Sir Evelyn waited, wondering much, not liking to move until his guest was ready ; the westering sun shone full upon the General's face, bringing out its strong lines.

"Are services ever remembered, Lee ?—by those who benefit by them ?"

"I have no experience in such matters, General,"

"Neither have I, as yet, but I have my doubts ; nevertheless, duty is everything, reward immaterial."

With this creed on his lips Monk turned from the chapel, walking slowly with his head bowed, as if revolving some deep problem.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE PARADISE

GENERAL MONK left Grangeland at the conclusion of the prescribed time. Hardly an hour had passed without the arrival of a mounted messenger bearing dispatches; the Lord Mayor of London, and the Corporation of that great city; the leaders of the Rump Parliament; Lord Fairfax, as representing the gentlemen of Yorkshire; Fleetwood, Lambert, Desborough, Generals of Cromwell's old army; Peers and Commoners; Corporations; Commanders of Fortresses; all these varied interests kept themselves in touch with the iron man, who alone bore upon his shoulders the responsibility of the future, a patriot without self-seeking, inscrutable in his magnificent silence. This coming and going, the spurring of horses to the door, and their departure; riders carrying messages which betrayed nothing and promised nothing, made Sir Evelyn Lee realize, after a fashion he had not hitherto done, how entirely George Monk was the man of the hour, the Arbiter of the destinies of England. In the few moments

during which they were alone, Lee urged upon his old friend the settlement which he believed would alone prove the solution of the nation's difficulties.

"Declare," he urged him, "for a free Parliament; let the Members come back who have been banished these ten years; then let the nation express its will by election."

"In other words, Lee, send for your friend Charles Stuart?"

"That is as it may be; at any rate, the country should pronounce the verdict."

"I am the servant, and bear the commission of the Speaker and the House of Commons as now constituted; what they tell me I must do."

This had been Monk's dictum throughout; it had been his response to every deputation which approached him; he was the servant, not the master. How far he believed it in his heart of hearts will ever remain a question; at any rate, he adhered to the formula until the cloak grew so threadbare, so impossible to cover him, that it had to be discarded. That time had not yet arrived.

"Is your Parliament, then, free while men like Fleetwood, Lambert, and Desborough, narrow sectaries, hold the Army in the hollow of their hand, and sit at the Council table ready to coerce Speaker and Commons the moment they fail to do their will?"

Monk winced; it was the one tender spot which

galled him; the Generals had been his lifelong rivals; they had ignored him when he was too far distant to be considered; directly he had asserted his right to be heard, after Cromwell's death, they had sought to undermine his authority, and dismiss him from the place in that section of the Forces where he reigned supreme; now they were watching his advance with sullen eyes and lowering brows; had they been united nothing but a civil war could have been the solution, but jealous as they were of Monk, the Generals of the Army near London were even more suspicious of one another; Fleetwood was jealous of Lambert, Lambert was aiming surreptitiously at Fleetwood's downfall, while Desborough feared and disliked both. Cromwell had welded them all together, but the master mind was gone.

Sir Evelyn escorted his guest and the Commissioners some distance on their way towards the headquarters of the Army; Mr. Secretary Scot to the last kept up his insensate tirade against monarchy, popery, prelacy, and all their works.

Lee rode back thoughtfully, his head bent forward, as was his wont when deeply stirred by inward meditation. He turned aside to the little chapel and knelt before the restored altar, praying for his country, as were millions of loyal souls throughout the length and breadth of the land. Other than that they were unable to do. The veterans of the Army, heroes of a hundred fights, were too strong

to admit of the nation rising in arms, undisciplined, unprepared; the lesson had been dearly bought and bitten deep. Discipline was everything, enthusiasm impracticable.

Perhaps Sir Evelyn uttered but few actual words during that half-hour which he spent in the ancient chapel of his house, his heart was full of a message to the Supreme Power which did not easily declare itself in words; but he left the building more restful, more hopeful than he had been when he entered it.

Two days later Robert Darcy came down-stairs; his wound healed, but somewhat of his weakness remaining and asserting itself. It was a new experience to him, the fortnight which followed at Grangeland Abbey. He had travelled abroad, as all men of family and position did in those days; he had been a soldier in an army noted for its discipline, its stern adherence to all the rules of war, as well in times of peace as in the presence of an enemy. But of home life he had seen and enjoyed nothing since he was a stripling; lately he had been through an experience which had tried to the utmost seasoned and veteran soldiers, no doubt it was these privations and hard marchings, which had helped to make him more susceptible to the wound which had laid him low.

The snow had disappeared; in its place a soft air had come in, waking the earth to premature spring.

Darcy walked in the park, resting on Sir Evelyn's arm; Lucille pacing by their side. If the baronet was engaged, Darcy would accompany the girl when she visited the still-room, and even the inner kitchen where she continued to prepare small delicacies to tempt his appetite. Their cousinship, although not very exact, took him out of the category of a mere guest, so that he was treated with a familiarity which would not have been accorded to any one else.

"I know now to whom I owe all those tempting things which were brought to my bedside," Darcy said, lifting Lucille's hand gallantly to his lips, by way of recognition and appreciation.

"We admit you to all the secrets of the house, Cousin," Lucille answered playfully; "it is strange for us to have any one here in the way you are; my father and I live so much alone; you do not know how good it is for us to have you at the Abbey, my dear father was saying so this morning; we are so shut up month after month, and year after year, we are like two snails inhabiting one shell; now that you are here to share it, we understand how selfish we have been."

"Selfish!" he protested, "I should think there was no one less so than you and your father."

"Ah! you do not know our faults;" she shook her head until the ringlets round it all seemed to gyrate like separate entities,

"You have been wonderfully good to me; I shall never forget it."

"We are only too pleased to have had the opportunity."

Lucille spoke the absolute truth.

One day they strolled together through the paradise, as the more formal garden of the Manor was called in those days; here, the yews, privets, and other shrubs were cut into fantastic shapes, and kept carefully trimmed, representing peacocks, solitary eagles with wings outstretched, and other birds and animals; underneath were the beds in which the flowers grew, dear to Lucille's heart, and which she tended herself; as yet only primroses, violets and snowdrops had opened their eyes to the world; the violets and primroses hidden away in secluded corners, the snowdrops more openly as became growths of the winter.

Darcy stooped down as they reached the end of the path and picked a small bunch of the primroses, which nestled under the protection of a privet hedge, the latter barring the passage that way. He held them up to her.

"I should like you to wear them," he said, "and sometimes when you come into the garden, after I am gone, to pick others for the same purpose; they will be a mnemonic, reminding you of me, and all the kind things I have received at your hands."

She stretched out her hand to take the flowers;

their eyes met. They had often walked side by side but not heretofore faced one another ; the morning light rested upon Lucille, not so that the sun's rays dazzled, but just enough to bring out the perfection of her skin and colouring, the limpid clearness of her eyes, the delicate grace of her face. Something in Robert's look told Lucille that he liked what he saw, and she felt a quickening, a stirring of something new and strange ; the maiden depths of her being woke to life, as the spring flowers were doing at her feet, now that the sun of February shone upon them ; the sap of her life moved within her as it did in the trees overhead, in the hedge before her ; that uprising of nature which is at once a hope and a resurrection, a vital recurring power which can never be ignored or obliterated.

"Thank you," she said, "I am not likely to forget even without these ; I never could forget."

"I love to think that," he said, "yet I want to have your promise ; at least once a week you will return to this spot and find something here to place against your bosom, even if it be only a green tendril to wear in remembrance."

"I promise," she answered.

"I shall be far away ; in London perhaps, a place I hate, but my master is like to be there in the future ; or it may be I shall be sent out on some errand, north, south, east or west, even perchance across the seas ; my thoughts will go back to this

spot, where you and I have stood together and looked into each other's eyes."

The girl looked down, already she had fastened the flowers in a brooch at her breast. With her toe she traced a pattern in the soft gravel at her feet.

"I do not like to think of your going away, Cousin; the Abbey will seem different without you, almost empty and deserted; my father will feel it, too."

"I shall ask his leave to come back, when the stress of duty permits," Darcy declared.

"Will that be long?" she faltered.

"Nay, Cousin, I cannot tell; it will be short if I can make it so, but a soldier has to obey orders, and go where those orders direct."

"Yet you could be free if you chose," she suggested.

Darcy was a rich man, having inherited a house at Kingston, and a property in Essex from an uncle on his mother's side; his brother possessing the family estates in Hampshire.

"That is true," he answered, "and perhaps one day, when General Monk no longer needs me, I may ask my freedom. I never thought of it till this moment; hitherto, the life of a soldier has been my ideal, but since I came to the Abbey other things have come into my mind;" he lowered his voice, "visions of home, a home like this—of love, the love of wife and children."

She did not reply; her bosom rose and fell.

Robert Darcy's words, still more his tones, suggested a future, not near, not tangible, but, nevertheless, possible. In some things she was a child in spite of her sixteen years, in others almost a woman.

After a while he went on: "Curiously enough, I have a house by a river which looks out almost as Grangeland does, over the waters as they flow by: mine is by the Thames; yours on Avon banks. I have never lived in mine, it is given up to caretakers, but sometimes I visit it, to see that all is right; up to now I have thought but little about it; henceforward when I go there it will mean something different to me." He turned and looked at Lucille swiftly, having for the last two minutes been regarding the long path, and the walls of the Abbey, rising up grey and lichen-clad at the end of it. "I shall associate it," he continued, "with you, Cousin Lucille."

"With me!" she exclaimed in surprise, "why with me? I have never seen it!"

He smiled: "Because you have helped to teach me a lesson I shall never forget."

"How can I teach you anything?"

"You and your father have taught me what a home may be; you have given me an insight into what love is; of this you may be sure, I shall come back for another course of the same lesson; you believe me? You will look forward to it, as well as I, Lucille?"

He held out his hand. "Promise!" he said.

"Two promises in one morning!"

"Nay, they are only one, two halves of the same whole, as soul and body are one, as night and day complete the hours."

He still held her hand. She let it rest there. A slight colour enhanced the beauty of her cheeks, and crept down to the whiteness of her throat.

"Since you say so, Cousin, it must be true; I therefore promise this likewise."

He bent down and kissed the hand he held.

The great bell of the Abbey clanged out a warning that dinner would be served in a few minutes.

"How quickly the morning has sped," he declared.

"I had no idea the hour was so late."

"Nor I," she answered. "I suppose it is because we have been——" she broke off.

"Yes?"

"So happy!"

CHAPTER VII

ON THE WATCH-TOWER

SIR EVELYN was awaiting them in the library of the Abbey when they returned after their stroll in the paradise. He had ridden that morning over to the nearest town, ostensibly to call on his lawyer, really to hear the latest news from the capital. There was a worried look on his face, as if information of a disquieting nature had reached him.

Darcy had come in with a certain feeling of elation ; he had realized during the last few days that his outlook upon life had been a singularly narrow one, in a sense selfish ; now there had come into his sky a rift, through which the sunshine penetrated, not as yet flooding the whole earth with its warmth, but giving a foretaste of what might be later.

Lucille was too young for any idea of betrothal taking place, neither had Robert Darcy as yet put such an idea into definite shape even in the recesses of his own mind, but the possibility of some such future association had been very near to him during the last two hours. He did not suppose for a

moment that Lucille understood, or shared what was at the back of his mind, but her gracious girlhood, her evident liking and friendship made him feel that this new element which had crossed his horizon would grow into something more, if the future proved kindly.

The sight of Sir Evelyn's face recalled Robert to the more stern realities of life; he was brought down from the clouds, and reminded that the rigorous duties of his profession might demand his services at any moment.

"I am afraid, sir, you have not heard favourable news."

"Not altogether; your General has made his entry into London and been received there with a certain reserve; he is doubtless clear in his own mind, but has not succeeded in convincing his friends as to what his intention may be."

Darcy understood what Sir Evelyn meant; the Royalists had hoped that Monk on his arrival in the metropolis would have issued a proclamation, dealing with the political situation, and pronouncing for a general election; instead Monk had declared himself once more the servant of the Speaker, and had refused to listen to any negotiations on the part of the King's friends.

"You must remember, sir," Darcy said, "the character of the man you have to deal with, he only hurries when there is occasion to strike; then no man

does it so quickly ; at other times he has found the wisdom of hastening slowly."

"I do not object to that provided he is moving in the right direction, but how are we to be assured that he is doing so? He has not said a word, from the beginning to the end, which would justify our hopes."

"There is the more reason, sir, to think that General Monk would act wisely for the good of the country when the time comes ; to speak prematurely is to put your opponents in possession of your plans. Believe me, sir, General Monk knows his own mind now, as he has done in the past ; one day he will show his hand, but it will only be when the fist is clenched, and his whole force is at the back of the blow he delivers."

"You have great faith in his wisdom, Robert," Sir Evelyn remarked almost testily.

"I have served under him for five years ; during that time I have never known him make a mistake, and of late, at any rate, he has been taxed with intricate situations which would have baffled any skill but his own to solve."

"He will have to act in one direction very quickly," was Sir Evelyn's rejoinder ; "I hear for a certainty that General Lambert has escaped from the Tower, and that Colonel Desborough is raising the Welsh border with a view to civil war."

Darcy smiled ; directly afterwards he looked grave,

when he remembered what it would mean for himself.

"You will see, sir, that Monk will move quickly enough if your information is correct ; danger stimulates him, and Lambert I know to be his *bête noir*."

"I hope your words will prove correct," the baronet rejoined dubiously. The second bell sounded. "Will you kindly take Lucille in to dinner?" he added.

As they walked side by side the girl pressed his arm.

"I liked to hear what you said about General Monk," she said, "he makes me feel like that ; there is something so quiet and restful about him. He is like the river which flows ever onwards towards the sea, whatever betides, wind or storm, rain or snow ; I like to feel its power ; your General seemed to me just as inevitable. My father does not think so because he wants something very much, and it makes him doubt the likelihood of getting it."

They were walking along the corridor ; Sir Evelyn had remained behind for a moment or two to open a window.

"Is that always the case?" Darcy inquired.

"What do you mean, Cousin?"

"That if we want anything very much, we never believe we shall get it?"

"I think it is so with most people, especially when they grow older."

"Then I hope I may remain young," Darcy responded; he pressed her arm against his side.

She took her place at the end of the table with a pretty grace, a modest dignity, which he always admired.

Three days passed, during which Darcy fully recovered all his physical strength; he knew that the time had come for him to leave the Abbey, and go back to his duty as General Monk's aide-de-camp. He could never have believed that he should face this obligation with so much reluctance; hitherto, when any enforced idleness had come to him, it had irked him dreadfully that he should be forcibly detained, whether the cause was indisposition, an unusual circumstance, or a command which placed him in an outpost away from the centre of things; now he would have been glad of a mandate to remain. The quiet life at the Abbey; companionship with a man finely moulded, like Sir Evelyn Lee; constant association with a girl of high intelligence, with that glamour of possibility about her, which is the heritage of the young, a mind receptive, a nature visibly expanding, a soul untainted; all these enclosed in a casket, which satisfied Darcy's estimate of the fitness of things.

But Duty had ever been his watchword; he must tear himself away at whatever cost.

On the afternoon of the third day Sir Evelyn was engaged in transacting certain business connected

with his estate in Picardy, requiring correspondence with his French factor ; Lucille and their guest were left to entertain one another.

It was a lovely day, bright with sunshine, but with a certain crispness of frost in the air and biting the ground.

"What are we to do this afternoon ?" Darcy said. "Do you know this is my last day at the Abbey ; to-morrow morning I must start for London."

"So soon ?" she exclaimed.

"So late," he answered ; "I ought to have gone to-day, perhaps even yesterday ; any excuse for delay is quite gone ; I never felt better in my life."

"We shall hear of you ?" she asked, "as well as from you ? It seems strange, a little while ago I only knew of you by name as a relation, now I can hardly believe that there was ever a time when we were not acquainted with one another."

"Friendship harks backwards as well as forwards," he suggested ; "it cements the past with the present and future."

"I like to think that," she said.

"You have not answered my question ; what do you suggest that we do ?"

"You have never been to the top of our turret ; there is a very fine view from there, especially over the river, and the country lying beyond it."

"I should like that very much. Of course I have

noticed the tower, but I was not aware that there was any means of reaching it."

This turret of which Lucille spoke was at the top of the north wing of the Abbey; there was no corresponding tower at the south end, which had been built nearly a hundred years later.

"Oh yes; there is a stairway; we do not use it much in the winter, but in the summer I often go up there with a book, and sometimes my father goes too. I did not suggest it before, because I thought you might find the steps trying after your illness."

"Are there so many of them?"

"Not more than seventy or eighty, but some of them are rather steep."

They were standing in the great hall of the Abbey. At this moment they heard the clatter of a horse's feet on the drive outside; the rider pulled up before the door; no man-servant being about, Darcy went himself and opened the oak door; something told him the new arrival had a message for himself; he was not mistaken; a mounted trooper sat on his horse, and was just about to dismount, taking a missive from his haversack.

Seeing Darcy, he saluted. "A note for you, Captain."

Robert descended the steps, and took the envelope which the trooper handed to him; he recognized the handwriting on the outside; it was that of Dr,

Clarges, General Monk's brother-in-law and confidant.

"You have ridden far and fast, my friend," Darcy commented, noting the heaving flanks and foam-flecked bridle of the sturdy roadster on which he was mounted.

"Yes, sir; those who carry the General's messages had best bestir themselves, or they bear them not again."

Captain Darcy nodded; that was the secret of Monk's success, slow to speak, swift to strike, deceiving by his very silence, confusing by the rapidity of action; this, too, was the spirit which animated the small force he commanded and made it a power equal to, nay, superior to, an army of treble its numbers, doubtful, disunited.

"What are your orders?" Darcy inquired.

"To await your reply, Captain; then to return alone, or in company with your honour."

Lucille had come up, and was standing on the top step, looking down upon the scene below.

"The man and his horse will want refreshment surely," she said; "there is no public accommodation nearer than the White Horse on the one side and the Three Tuns at Melbury on the other."

Robert had turned when Lucille spoke; he noted the anxious look on her face. It was a time when news was a vital thing as regards the country, and in

this case the personal element could not be overlooked or disregarded.

He turned back to the trooper and said : "Take your horse round to the stable ; see that it has a good feed and go yourself into the kitchen, where you will be as hospitably received as I have been ; I will let you know my answer after you have refreshed yourself."

Thus bidden, the trooper gathered up the reins, saluted, and rode off in the direction Darcy had given with the wave of his hand, when he mentioned the stables.

Lucille turned back into the hall, while Robert broke the seal of the missive, standing there on the step.

It ran as follows : "To Capt. Darcy A.D.C.—This is to inform you that John Lambert, some time General of the Army of the Commonwealth, committed to the Tower because of treasonable designs, has broken loose therefrom and escaped the vigilance of the outposts round London ; he is known at this time to be making headway in the Midlands, and unless his force is broken, and himself captured grave results may ensue. The Commander-in-Chief has ordered Colonels Howard and Ingoldsby to march against Lambert to effect, if possible, his capture"—'alive or dead,' Darcy commented to himself—"if sufficiently restored, the General wishes you to attach

yourself to this party, as your knowledge of the locality may be of service. These instructions will be followed by another message intimating the place of meeting; you are to hold yourself in readiness, so as to start without any delay."

The letter was signed with General Monk's own characteristic scrawl, "George M."

Darcy turned back, full of thought, into the house, where Lucille was anxiously awaiting him.

"Well?" she queried.

"An expedition has been organized for the capture of Lambert, the Republican Leader, who has escaped from the Tower; I am to hold myself in readiness to join them at a moment's notice."

While he was speaking Sir Evelyn Lee came out of the private room or office in which he transacted business, and sometimes heard cases as a magistrate. Darcy at once explained to his host what was on foot.

"Lambert is a dangerous man," he commented, his face set and stern.

"Yes; he has the ear of a large section of the army; if he can gather together anything like a force, a fight for supremacy is inevitable between my master and himself."

"It is to be hoped that the expedition which is being sent out will effect its purpose."

"It will if one man can manage it," Darcy responded.

"Yourself?" Sir Evelyn inquired, with a smile, misunderstanding him.

"No! but the finest soldier, with the exception of one, that the army possesses."

"Pray who is that?"

"Dick Ingoldsby, whom Cromwell dubbed the best sabre in the three kingdoms, adding that 'he could neither pray nor preach, but he could fight.'"

"Your General will not mind those disabilities so much as Master Cromwell did."

"Just so."

Immediately after this, Corporal Longstaffe came from the direction of the kitchen to receive his master's orders, having had an interview with the trooper before doing so.

"See that our horses are saddled ready for immediate departure," Darcy directed, "but we are not to start until a fresh order arrives."

Longstaffe went away to carry out his master's command.

"How about the turret?" Lucille inquired.

"Were you thinking of ascending the tower?" Sir Evelyn asked.

"Yes, we had just planned it when General Monk's messenger arrived," Darcy said.

"It makes a good watch-tower," Sir Evelyn explained, "you would see from it any one approaching the Abbey for some miles except in one direction,

that by which you yourself came ; the trees hide the road eastwards."

Darcy was loath to give up the idea, and Sir Evelyn's words clinched the matter.

"I am at your disposal, Cousin," he said to Lucille ; "as your father suggests, we should probably see any one arriving ; in any case I could be summoned immediately."

"I will give orders to that effect," Sir Evelyn put in, "and will also go with you to the turret."

Five minutes later they were all three ascending the spiral stairway towards the top of the tower.

Lucille was the first to emerge from the narrow doorway which opened upon the roof ; Captain Darcy followed, Sir Evelyn coming last, taking more time in the ascent. The roof was not quite flat, but had a narrow level space under the parapet, which ran all round the turret, then it rose in an inclined plane to an ornamental stone centre-piece, surmounted by a gargoyle, the grinning face of a satyr once no doubt hideous enough, but now softened by the growth of lichen and effects of wind and weather. The parapet had spaces between the taller and more ornamented portions of the stonework, on which people of ordinary height could lean, and overlook the landscape.

Lucille turned to Robert Darcy, laughing, as he emerged on to the roof.

"Are you breathless ?" she asked.

"No, not very."

"That is a sure sign you have recovered, and done credit to our nursing ; come ! now, and see the view." She stepped into one of the openings, Darcy coming to her side ; below them lay the park, the deer browsing in the spaces of the woods ; at one point the roof of the chapel could be seen just indicated among the elms and oaks, which grew to a considerable height on that side of the estate ; beyond this, again, was a narrow ribbon of road, along which the troopers had come on that never-to-be-forgotten evening, when the fugitives were hidden in the secret chamber by the side of the altar.

Sir Evelyn had now joined them.

"Lucille," he said, "is quite right, she is not showing you our best side first, Robert."

"Nothing could be more beautiful than this, sir, surely ?"

"Wait and see !"

Lucille led the way round, and another view presented itself, but still taking in only a section of the park and the more distant slopes beyond ; this was the direction in which lay the farm occupied by Ebenezer Holden, and the spot where Darcy received his wound from the Duke of Buckingham.

After a few minutes' interval Lucille led the way to the opposite side of the tower ; Darcy following her, uttered an exclamation.

The girl turned and looked pleased : "You like it ?" she said.

"Like it! I think it is perfectly beautiful!"

The river had come into view; it was lit up by the sunlight and lay golden almost at their very feet; its sinuous path stretched away as far as the eye could see, winding in and out between rich meadow-lands, with all the diversities which an English landscape offers at its best; wooded slopes, with hills of more commanding height against the sky-line; immediately beneath them was the stabling of the Abbey, clothed in ivy.

They stood for some minutes leaning side by side on the low wall, drinking in the beauty of the view. Suddenly Darcy drew himself up to his full height from the negligent position he had taken before; his interest was excited; in the distance was a number of moving figures, merely black spots at first, but growing more distinct as he looked, and his eye came into focus.

Lucille had been watching him; in her heart were mingled thoughts, satisfaction with his appreciation of the view, and regret to think he would soon be leaving; now she wondered what had attracted his attention and brought about that alert look which appeared on his face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Men," he answered briefly.

"Where?" She glanced down at the stabling immediately beneath them. A couple of grooms were leading out horses for exercise.

"Not there," he answered to her glance; he pointed with his finger, "cannot you see those black specks? I am sure there are men moving, and moving in this direction;" he shaded his eyes with his hand so as to keep the sunlight from them, while he looked intently.

"I cannot see anything," Sir Evelyn put in.

"I do!" Lucille cried, "but it might be a herd of cattle or horses."

"Yes, I thought that at first, but I am sure now that they are horsemen following the bank of the river."

"If so," Lucille replied, "we shall see them more distinctly in a few minutes."

Darcy did not answer; he was watching with intense absorption. The black spots had disappeared, a belt of trees intervened; if he was right they were making a detour round it. A quarter of an hour passed, during which time the silence was only broken by the sounds which came from the outbuildings of the Abbey—grooms calling to one another; whistling; the feet of the horses on the cobble-stones of the yard.

"There they are! now you can see them more distinctly," Robert cried.

"I can see them now, too," Sir Evelyn said; "I wonder who they can be?"

"They are soldiers of some kind," Darcy said confidently.

"How do you know?" Lucille inquired.

"By the precision with which they move; they are under one direction, and have been drilled."

"You have wonderful eyes, Cousin," the girl remarked; "I thought mine were good, but I should not have been able to find out all you have done at that distance."

"It is a matter of training," Robert answered, "I have had some years of scouting."

"They are probably looking for a ford," Sir Evelyn remarked after a pause; "the Avon is very full just now and not easy to cross."

"You think they want to come to our side of the river, father?"

"It looks like it; they will not be able to do so until they get to Martin's Reach;—you know the place?" Sir Evelyn turned to Darcy.

"Yes, at the broad part, where the island with the alders upon it is in the centre of the stream."

"Just so."

"We ought to be able to see them well from there."

"Not sufficiently to distinguish faces or even uniforms, I am afraid," was the baronet's response.

Darcy was thinking, his whole brain absorbed, engaged in putting two and two together; Lambert was somewhere in that neighbourhood, just beginning to draw to himself those discontented elements of Cromwell's army, who were prepared to go any lengths against General Monk and the new settlement; was

it possible that Providence or chance had been kind enough to show him the very men that the General wanted to discover and apprehend ?

A few minutes would solve the matter.

They waited ; Darcy excited after a fashion he had not known for a long time, an elation stirring within him at the thought that he might be instrumental in doing some great service for the General to whom he was devoted, and above all to the country which, at this juncture, needed the loyal duty of every true son.

In and out, the riders they were watching advanced, making detours when necessary, but ever recurring to the bank of the stream, growing continually more distinct ; they were about fifty in number.

At length they reached the spot Sir Evelyn had indicated, and at once drew up ; four abreast they put their horses to the stream.

When some two dozen had thus entered the river and become hidden behind the island already mentioned, Darcy clapped his hands.

CHAPTER VIII

MESSENGERS

"WILL you excuse me, while I give an order to my man?" Darcy asked comprehensively of his two companions.

"Certainly, Robert, of course," Sir Evelyn replied.

Darcy took a final, general look from the battlement, then turned and ran down the stairway. When his head alone remained in view he said: "You will keep an eye on those men? I shall be back again in a few minutes."

"We will duly report on your return," Lucille replied, entering with zest into the spirit of the thing. Neither she nor her father understood exactly what was in Robert's mind, but they felt sure he was in possession of some information, which made the movements they had been observing of supreme importance.

The sound of Captain Darcy's footsteps died away; silence supervened in the turret; father and daughter stood watching, neither speaking a word. The troopers, if such they were, crossed the river, then

drew up into some kind of formation, they almost felt as if they could hear the word of command, although, of course, such a thing was quite impossible, the distance being a couple of miles, as the crow flies. Three or four minutes later the band struck across the meadows and disappeared behind the shelter of a large wood, near to the ford on that side of the river.

Immediately after this the attention of the two on the turret was diverted to the space below them ; Captain Darcy was standing in the yard ; by his side stood his man, Corporal Longstaffe, with his arm hooked in the bridle of a horse, which was restive, impatient to be off.

"That is the next move in the game," Sir Evelyn said, "Robert does not let the grass grow under his feet ; in that he is like his master."

"I wonder what he intends to do," Lucille exclaimed, expressing her thoughts aloud, rather than addressing her father.

"We shall soon know, if he thinks it well to tell us ; but perhaps that is another lesson he has learnt from General Monk."

"A lesson of silence ?"

"Call it reticence ; I admire it, but sometimes it is a little irritating when one is deeply interested."

Longstaffe jumped into the saddle ; saluted ; Darcy said a last word, direction, warning, or caution ; the man rode out of the yard.

Five minutes passed; they heard the clatter of Darcy's feet, and the jingle of his spurs on the stone steps leading to the turret.

He came out on to the top: "Well?"

"They all crossed the river, formed up, and disappeared," Sir Evelyn Lee replied.

"I guessed they would do that," Darcy said; "I have sent Longstaffe after them to ascertain in which direction they are moving, and to find out where they are likely to bivouac for the night."

"Supposing he is observed?" Lucille asked.

Robert smiled: "He has had an experience which is not given to every English soldier; he has seen fighting among the Indians in America, where in fact he was brought up; he will track those men unseen, unheard, unsuspected; that is why I sent him instead of going myself."

"I half thought they might be coming here," Sir Evelyn said, after a pause.

"I do not think that is at all likely; they will keep clear of your property, sir, except at one point."

Both Lucille and her father looked surprised. "What do you mean, Cousin?" the girl asked.

"They have a sympathizer in this district, if I am not much mistaken."

"You are thinking of Ebenezer Holden?" Sir Evelyn exclaimed; "I had for the moment forgotten him."

"Yes ; by his looks he is one with them ; and what happened the other day will have sharpened his preferences and prejudices to a fine point."

"You mean the beating he received by His Grace of Buckingham's orders ?"

"Yes ; it would turn a Cavalier into a Roundhead, and a Roundhead into a fanatic."

"Holden was the latter, already," Sir Evelyn commented, "but a capital farmer, and an excellent tenant all the same."

"I can quite understand that," Darcy agreed, "no one in his senses ever doubted the splendid stuff, the probity and courage in the material, out of which old Noll made his soldiers ; I should never ask to lead a finer set of men ; but when they want to bend all England to their will, and make all men fit into their mould, the matter becomes of a different complexion ; they speak of liberty, and try and put it into a strait waistcoat."

Once again all three were standing looking out from the opening in the battlement. Nothing was now to be seen but the calm beauty of the landscape ; no one would have suspected that the tide of civil war had surged so close to the Abbey and its quiet domain, only a few minutes earlier.

Presently Sir Evelyn remarked, "You came to a quick decision just now, Robert ; I suppose you saw more than we did ?"

"I saw the one thing which interested me most."

"May I ask what that was, or ought I not to be told?"

"General Lambert was in the midst of those men!" Darcy responded quietly.

"Lambert!" Sir Evelyn exclaimed, "how can you be sure of that?"

"In the first place I guessed it, because I knew he was moving in these parts; in the second place I saw him!"

"Could you possibly distinguish any individual at that distance?"

"Lambert rides after a fashion which once seen no horseman is likely to forget; he stoops down almost bunching himself on his horse's neck; just before I ran down-stairs his troopers were parted in front and behind; he was left alone, I could then see his characteristic attitude quite distinctly."

Sir Evelyn glanced at his daughter with appreciation in his eyes of Darcy's quickness of vision.

"It may be a great thing for you," the girl suggested, "if you could help to capture General Lambert."

"I was not thinking of myself, but of the country," he answered simply.

Darkness was beginning to come stealing across the sky and over the landscape before they descended from the tower. Darcy had enjoyed the quiet of that last hour; he knew he was leaving it behind; that action and turmoil, perhaps war awaited him.

Coming events cast their shadows before them at the same time they threw into strong relief the rest and joy of that feeling of companionship, which subsisted between the Lees and himself.

"It is time we went down, the night will be cold," Sir Evelyn remarked at length.

Darcy took a deep breath, as if he would inhale the air and expand his lungs with the recollection of its sweetness.

"I am more than glad we came up," he said ; "not merely because of what we have seen, but for the association I shall always have with this afternoon."

"I am pleased I suggested it," Lucille replied, "I do not think we shall any of us ever forget it. Come ! as before, I will lead the way."

The girl descended the stairway, her father following, Darcy last.

In the hall Robert inquired whether any news had come, and received a reply in the negative ; there was nothing to do but wait. Sir Evelyn and Lucille went for a walk in the park, but Darcy was afraid to accompany them, as a messenger might come for him at any moment, and every second would be of intense importance when the summons once arrived. He stood on the top step and watched father and daughter walking away, until they disappeared among the trees in the direction of the chapel.

Supper was served at the Abbey at six o'clock ; up to that time no messenger had come for Captain

Darcy, neither had Longstaffe returned. They sat down to their meal in silence, a certain constraint upon the party, a tense feeling that news might come at any moment, and the sitting be interrupted.

Robert Darcy had grown impatient during the last hour with the impatience of an energetic man who has to wait while others act; there was the added anxiety as to the fitting in of the various parts of the puzzle; orders might come to him to join Colonel Ingoldsby before Longstaffe returned, or Longstaffe might come with the most valuable information as to the whereabouts of General Lambert, which could not be turned to account, owing to the failure of Ingoldsby to communicate with the Captain as promised; this was the see-saw of continuous speculation in his mind before the great bell summoned them to supper. There was a further possibility, which Darcy had refused to entertain earlier in the afternoon, namely, that Longstaffe might fail in his quest for Lambert's expedition, or even be captured by the party he had gone to observe.

The Captain with little appetite compelled himself to partake of the viands set before him; it might be some hours before he had another meal, and he was too experienced a campaigner, not to realize the importance of a reserve of strength before a night expedition.

Lucille and her father understood the young soldier's preoccupation and respected it. They

looked after his creature comforts with forethought and readiness, but beyond the necessary questions as to what he would take, and verbal suggestions from his host, not a word passed until the meal was almost over.

Then Sir Evelyn said: "If General Lambert should fall into your hands, you will remember that we have a strong room here in which he could lie with safety for a night, before you start on the march to London; in my capacity as a magistrate I have had more than one prisoner temporarily detained at the Abbey, before they could be handed over to the county authorities."

"Thank you, Sir Evelyn, I will bear it in mind; I only hope the matter may come to such a conclusion, as to put your apartment to the use you suggest." Darcy spoke somewhat despondently; as the words passed his lips, he sprang to his feet. "There is some one at last," he cried.

As he had been the first to notice the company of men like specks beyond the river, so was he now the first of the three to hear the distant thud of horse-hoofs on the gravel of the drive. With an apology he hurried from the table, and so out into the hall.

The night was dark when he threw back the great hall door; he ran down the steps just in time to receive a trooper, wearing the same uniform as the messenger who had arrived earlier in the afternoon

from Colonel Ingoldsby; their faces were lighted up by the rays of the great lamp above the entrance. Sir Evelyn and Lucille had come with some eagerness behind their guest, and now stood looking down upon the scene. The two soldierly figures, with the horse completing the picture, stood out against the dark mist which covered the surface of the park; it was a cameo of war. Lucille, at any rate, felt it represented something she had never seen, never realized, yet which had surrounded at no great distance the days of her childhood; the strong hard features of the veteran, who had just come up, lined with service; the more refined, but still strenuous and determined aspect of Captain Darcy, no longer looking as he had done when they walked together in the park, or as he sat at the table, but with a totally new expression, suggesting a hound on the leash, ready to spring forward as soon as it was free towards the quarry scented from afar. The flickering yellow rays of the lamp produced a weird and sombre effect, heightening the impression which the picture created. The girl felt herself shudder from head to foot; an impression of anxiety, of coming trouble came over her which had no foundation, at any rate, for some time to come, but which arose from the glimpse she was now getting of a very different life from the one to which she was accustomed.

Darcy and the trooper talked together in low tones; the purport of what was said failed to reach the ears

of the two onlookers ; every now and again Darcy turned listening, looking in the direction from which he expected Longstaffe to return.

Sir Evelyn and his daughter understood what was in their guest's mind ; one part of the puzzle had come to the fitting ; Robert now desired all the more earnestly that portion which ought to make it complete.

After some ten minutes the trooper remounted and cantered round to the stabling.

"I give you half-an-hour," Darcy called, "then both of you must be ready to accompany me."

"Yes, sir," the man answered, without turning in his saddle.

Darcy stood for a minute or two, his head on one side, his whole sense of hearing concentrated by his will-power. No sound came upon the breeze ; with a shrug of annoyance and dissatisfaction, he began to remount the steps, and at once perceived Sir Evelyn Lee and Lucille. He did not speak until he had reached their level ; then he adopted the same low tones which he had used in his colloquy with the trooper.

"Colonel Ingoldsby, with one hundred and twenty men at his back, has reached a village which the messenger tells me is only about four miles from here, called Leastoke ; I do not remember coming across it in our rides?"

"No, it lies rather out of the way, in a cleft

between two hills; the main road is half-a-mile distant from the first houses of the village."

"Ingoldsby has a good eye for a camping-place, and I believe he knows this part of the country," Darcy commented.

"The spot would be easy to defend in case of attack," Sir Evelyn replied, "and the hills on either side would afford good positions for sentries."

Darcy nodded as if the information coincided with his expectation.

"I shall start for the camp," he said after a minute, "in half-an-hour; if Longstaffe has not returned by then he must follow me."

"Supposing he does not come back at all?" Sir Evelyn suggested.

Darcy did not require to give an answer, for again horse-hoofs sounded through the darkness. Longstaffe was upon them immediately, having galloped across the grass, which deadened the sound of his approach. Darcy glanced at Sir Evelyn with not a little satisfaction; then ran to get his servant's report.

CHAPTER IX

A NIGHT MARCH

A few minutes later Captain Darcy rode away from the Abbey ; before him went the two troopers who had come from Colonel Ingoldsby ; behind him was Corporal Longstaffe, who had located Lambert's small force close to Ebenezer Holden's farm, as Robert had expected. Holden was evidently a man of some importance in the eyes of the fanatical party, which sought to dominate the country and destroy the influence of General Monk ; otherwise Lambert would not have come out of his way to pick up Holden and any contingent of sympathizers the latter might be able to raise.

The darkness was considerable when they passed out of the park into the open road, they had to ride warily and trust somewhat to the instinct of their horses. Darcy allowed his bridle to lie easily on the neck of his steed ; his own thoughts were busy, and they were not wholly taken up with the project immediately in view ; he was looking forward to

meeting the famous cavalry leader, and to their joint assault upon Lambert's position; the ardour of the soldier was stirring in him; he was elated with the feeling that in spite of the fact that he had been left behind, good luck had given him a part in effecting a coup, which might be of the utmost importance in the history of that undertaking which General Monk had in hand. Yet with all this running in his head, through it all was the feeling that the quiet days, the restful enjoyment of his last weeks at the Abbey were over; that page in his life was turned, and he was about to commence another, and a fresh sheet. What was written was indelible; he realized that something had come into his existence which had not been there before, that Providence had linked his own fortunes with those of the Lees; that the time would come when he would return to the place which he must shortly leave, with perhaps some idea of a more permanent bond. Robert Darcy could hardly be said at this moment to be exactly in love with Lucille Lee, he only knew that she attracted him as no one had ever done before; he felt assured that this attraction would be all the greater when that development took place in her character, her whole being, physical and mental, which was impending. To study human nature, above all to study the character and possibilities of a girl, fresh, immature, intensely interesting, all this was so new to Robert that he gave it an immense amount of

thought and attention, as he rode at a walking pace through the impressive silence of the night.

A full hour had passed, during which time not a single word had been exchanged between the members of the small party, when one of the troopers, after speaking to his companion, turned back to Captain Darcy. The latter reined in his horse for fear the animals should collide. At this point they were passing through a narrow defile with trees on either hand, not one step visible before they reached it.

"What is this?" he asked.

"We must be close, Captain," the trooper replied, "to the line of sentries. I thought I ought to tell you, sir, that we have nearly reached our destination."

Hardly had the words been spoken before they were challenged; no doubt the sound of voices had reached the ears of the nearest outpost. They could hear the click of a lock and could see the light of a fuse glimmering amongst the shrubbery a little further on.

"Who are you? Answer, or I fire."

"You had better reply," Darcy said to the trooper.

"I am Trooper Credland; I have brought Captain Darcy to Colonel Ingold-by."

"Pass, Credland and party,"—the lighted fuse disappeared.

Darcy nodded with satisfaction to himself, as he shook up Moonlight, and proceeded on his way; Colonel Dick Ingoldsby was a soldier after his own heart, quick in action, daring to a degree, at the same time cautious where caution was necessary.

They left the small wood behind them and began to ascend. The snow, which had melted on all the low-lands, still lay white on the ridge, conspicuous against the surrounding blackness, as if an army were lying dead under its shroud on both sides of the way.

Tents came into view, picked out by watch-fires at either end of the camp, and at one place in the centre. Credland led the way to this last point. As they rode up Colonel Ingoldsby issued from his tent entrance, without his mail, as if he had just risen from his couch.

Robert dismounted and shook him warmly by the hand. Ingoldsby was a man thin to the point of emaciation, tall, with abnormally long arms; he made full use of his powers of reach, when his famous sabre was cutting its way through the ranks of his enemies; his eyes were small but keen, his nose like a bird's beak, the chin rose up to meet it, giving his face and whole expression the similitude of some bird of prey, eagle or vulture.

"I am glad to see you, Darcy, and to know you are well enough to join our party: you can have a shake-down in my tent to-night."

"I do not think I shall require it, Colonel," Darcy replied. "I have news for you which will make it necessary to boot and saddle without delay; I have located General Lambert!"

"By the Lord Harry! that is the best thing I have heard for many a long day. You are sure, of course?"

"Quite. I marked him this afternoon riding at the head of about fifty men. He crossed the Avon at a ford within sight of Grangeland Abbey. I guessed he was on his way to the farm of Ebenezer Holden."

"I know the man," Ingoldsby put in. "He was one of old Noll's sergeants; he might have risen higher in the ranks if he had chosen."

"That's the man. I sent my servant, Corporal Longstaffe, and he discovered Lambert's camp close to the farm. They were evidently fixed up there for the night."

"Then, by Jupiter, we have them," Ingoldsby replied, slapping his thigh. Blowing a whistle, there was instantly the sound of stirring throughout the camp.

In a quarter of an hour the whole company was under arms, the horses saddled, and ready to start. Ingoldsby told off a small contingent to remain and guard the camp, then he gave the order to start, Longstaffe now acting as guide.

Darcy and the Colonel rode side by side; the

latter was mounted on a horse which curiously suggested a resemblance to its rider, long-necked and lean, evidently capable both of endurance and great speed.

"If we get Lambert," the Colonel cried, "we save England from civil war."

"Does it amount to that?" Darcy inquired.

"Yes, every inch of it; the Sectaries are strong in numbers, sullen, discontented, ready to rise against Monk, but they lack a leader; now that Lambert has escaped from the Tower all their hopes are fixed upon him; he is the one man they trust."

"How about Fleetwood and Desborough?"

"Neither of them carries the confidence of Cromwell's old soldiers; Lambert does, therefore Lambert is dangerous. When I lodge him in the Tower again, I shall say, 'Dick, you have done your duty.' I promised 'Honest George' he should have him, and by the Lord, Darcy, I feel to-night that I shall keep my word."

After this conversation they lapsed into silence. Ingoldsby was meditating all the details of the surprise which he hoped to effect; Darcy was again left to his own thoughts. The words of the Colonel had brought him back effectually into the vortex of that stirring time; he understood that Monk was waiting, gathering the forces of the realm together into his strong hands, playing the same game, only

now in London, that he had done before, first in Scotland, and afterwards on the march. Ingoldsby with his company, Colonel Howard with another force, also in pursuit of Lambert, but nearer the Welsh border, were pawns in Monk's hands; he was moving them from his place at Whitehall just as he was manipulating Parliament and the city under his immediate eye; how many more pieces in the game were being ordered simultaneously no one could tell, except the General himself, and perhaps one or two whom he admitted to his confidence.

There is something about a night foray which has its influence upon the feelings and spirits of all who take part in it; even the men, brightest and most jovial by day, assume a certain gravity under the conditions of darkness and caution, the need of extra vigilance, of more alert watchfulness, which characterize the hours after the sun has departed. This condition of affairs was not less marked than usual in the case of Colonel Dick Ingoldsby and his men; their leader rode with a grim determination, eagerly reaching forward to the accomplishment of the task which he had in hand; the officers under him, and the men they commanded, covered mile after mile with little more sound than the measured beating of hoofs, in unison, on the soft road; even the heavy saddles scarcely creaked; not a

horse neighed; it was like the steady advance of some spirits of the night going to a rendezvous of the Powers of the Air.

Some two hours passed in this way. Then there came, as if by a common instinct, a renewed evidence of preparation. Pistols were cocked; swords loosened from their scabbards: even the horses lifted their heads and expanded their nostrils, scenting the night air for some unexpected happening, some impending danger.

At last the whole cavalcade stopped; yet no one had given the word; it began with Longstaffe and the leading line of troopers, and so, retrospectively, included the whole company.

The night was fine, the clouds hurrying across the sky, no moon had as yet appeared, a few stars were gleaming furtively. A strange sound divided the silence of the night, cutting it like a sword; it was that of rude chanting. From a distance of perhaps three or four hundred yards the melody of a psalm rose up into the air, a melody, if such it could be called, harsh, yet tuneful, unbroken by a single note of sweetness, men's voices only. To the majority of those who listened, including, of course, both Colonel Dick Ingoldsby and Captain Darcy, the sound was familiar enough, although they had not heard it these many months past; it, or something very like it, had risen up to greet the sky on nights preceding days rendered historic for ever, before Edgehill,

Naseby, Dunbar, and a score of lesser fights; then thousands of voices, conquering, and to conquer, had swelled that strange melody; now, in spite of the harsh manliness of the voices, it sounded somewhat exiguous, somewhat lacking in strength and volume, to those who had been familiar with the days gone by. The contrast was indeed suggestive of the change which had come over the fortunes of that stern, puritan element, which had once meant more than anything else in the disposition of the forces of the State, but had now spent itself in the inevitable reaction, and was dwindling down to a sullen and melancholy end.

There was a movement among the troops as the psalm drew to its conclusion. Longstaffe was making his way to the Commanding Officer in order to report on the lay of the land, and to receive his instructions.

"Master Lambert," Ingoldsby said, "has grown careless in war, or he has forgotten the kind of man with whom he has to deal. Old Noll ought to have taught him better than to advertise the disposition of his men, unless he is very sure that an enemy of equal force is nowhere within hearing or striking distance."

"I certainly should have thought," Darcy replied, "that General Lambert would have been more cautious."

By this time Longstaffe had come up. He saluted,

then put in a word with that caustic shrewdness which was one of his characteristics.

"I suspect, sir, that in that camp there are a good many masters, and that Ebenezer Holden has as much to say in the arrangement of this as General John Lambert."

"I dare say you are right, Longstaffe; but now let us arrange how best to unslip the leash and capture the quarry, if possible without a throat being cut or a drop of blood shed; those were the General's orders, for a spark might set on fire all the hayricks and cornstacks in England."

Soon the dispositions were made; the men dismounted; the horses were tethered to the trees of a small wood which flanked one side of Holden's farm; then, in small detachments, they made the complete circuit of an intervening meadow, in the centre of which the tents of Lambert's small contingent had been pitched.

Colonel Ingoldsby took command on one side, and Darcy on the other, with Major Vandelour Ingoldsby's second in command, holding the road to the farm.

Silently, they drew the circle nearer and nearer round the unsuspecting enemy, who had evidently put out no pickets and placed no sentries.

A man's voice, stern and forbidding, rose from the centre of a black group, clustering close together round a beech-tree, which dominated this part of the

field. All one side of the meadow under the hedge was occupied by rows of horses each munching at a nosebag, while their masters were engaged in what passed for devotion, some twenty yards away from them.

Colonel Ingoldsby had taken in the whole situation ; he told off a dozen men to seize the horses ; then with a run the rest charged upon the meeting. Still the voice of exhortation struck upon their ears, calling out anathemas upon enemies, promising rewards here and hereafter to those who were faithful in the coming strife ; texts of Scripture culled from the Old Testament interlarded the address. Darcy knew the voice well ; it was that of Ebenezer Holden, the man who had been flogged by Buckingham's servants and who had prophesied the Duke's downfall.

With a final rush, Ingoldsby's men were upon them ; the invaders were two to one ; Lambert's force wholly unprepared. There was some little resistance, a few of the sturdier men were knocked down with the butt-end of pistols ; in five minutes the whole force had surrendered—with one exception.

Lambert himself had been standing apart from the main body of his followers, surveying them with folded arms ; perhaps realizing his own incapacity to sway these men to his will, and in fact understanding how slight was his hope of ultimate success in the larger endeavour which lay before him.

The General was the first to appreciate what was happening; too late he understood that Monk had struck with that rapidity of a sword-flash, which had marked his action so many times before.

Lambert ran to his horse, tripped up an unsuspecting trooper, who had just undone its head rope, then sprang on its back, and galloped across the field in the direction of a wood which lay on the further side. Once there he might hope to thread its mazes in the dark and escape. If he effected his purpose the whole success of the expedition was marred.

Colonel Ingoldsby had been watching the scene with those small, keen eyes which nothing escaped; he alone was mounted of the force under him; he heard the thud of Lambert's horse on the heavy grass-land, sodden with recent snow, and turning, with a curse, he started in pursuit.

Neither the flying foe, nor the man after him, could give any thought to the ground they were covering, they had to trust to the sagacity of the horses. Ingoldsby knew well the unmatched swiftness of his own lean steed, and he put it to a hand gallop. No one stirred; all awaited breathlessly the result of that single contest, on which so much depended. Hand over hand the Colonel drew nearer, the lust of victory, the blood thirst was in his brain; yet, even then, caution told him to capture, not to kill.

Lambert had almost reached the bank beyond which lay safety when the thud of his enemy's horse-hoofs sounded as a knell in his ears ; he swerved to the left, but at that instant a pistol was placed against his hatless forehead—the game was up.

CHAPTER X

THE SECRET MEETING

IN the private room at Whitehall, which General Monk had reserved for himself, as a place to which none came uninvited, he sat one night in the beginning of April, his head buried in his hands. The apartment was but scantily furnished, the table covered with documents, neatly docketed; on the wall hung the General's armour, with his sword stretched across two pegs beneath it; the contents of the table and the solitary decoration of the wall marked the antithesis in Monk's life; he was a soldier by trade, yet at this moment what England required of him was not so much military skill as the craft of statesmanship, using the phrase in the best sense.

A knock came at the door. The General looked up with anticipation in his face, not surprise. He had aged at least two years during as many months, but the bluff straightforward look remained which had earned for him the universal sobriquet of "Honest George."

Many things had happened since he rode at the head of his army down Chancery Lane and through the Strand to Westminster, too numerous to be set down in this chronicle. He had been offered by the remnant of Parliament the oath of abjuration, as it was called, an undertaking that in no case would he be a party to the recall of Charles Stuart ; some of the House had taken it, many had refused ; Monk was of the latter ; he declined to swear, he refused to sign the parchment handed to him. In all other respects he had so far been loyal to the Government, as at present constituted ; he had obeyed their mandate even when it involved a breach with the City of London ; his troops had destroyed the gates, and broken the portcullises of the city to the amazement and indignation of the Lord Mayor, and Common Council ; so far he had obeyed his masters. In the meantime he had been quietly dealing with the army, weeding out officers and men who were pledged to the party led by Vane, Lambert, Fleetwood, and Desborough. Lambert had escaped ; a letter had been intercepted from Desborough which showed there was an extensive conspiracy on foot to kill Charles and his brothers, to destroy Monk, to set up a permanent Republic in England.

All this might have been borne and met, had the Council of State been as loyal to Monk as Monk had shown himself to be in their service ; by evidence which could not be gainsaid he had learnt that this

was not the case. Haslerig, and the Republican leaders in the House were plotting, at this very moment, to remove him from his office of Commander-in-Chief, bestowed by an unanimous vote of Parliament.

At the same time a fresh complication had arisen, which touched Monk on his tenderest point, namely his patriotism. Charles was at Brussels, at that time under the sway of the King of Spain ; the Portuguese Ambassador had made Monk acquainted with a conspiracy entered into by the Court of Spain on the one side, and Cardinal Mazarin, as representing France on the other, to seize the person of Charles in view of a restoration ; the intention of these statesmen was to use the future King of England as a lever, to compel that country to give up the West Indian colonies to Spain, and Dunkirk to France.

Monk was consequently moved by two influences irrespective of one another, yet bringing about a result to which both tended.

The Council of State had failed to keep its word ; it was no longer to be trusted ; Monk felt himself freed from its allegiance ; on the other hand France and Spain were plotting against England ; Monk alone could frustrate that scheming. Both these courses pointed to the one thing which the General had hitherto declined to entertain, namely, direct communication with the exiled King.

That night as Monk sat with head bowed in his

hands he knew that the issue was ripe for decision ; that the crucial moment in the story of his own career, nay in the history of England, had arrived.

In obedience to an invitation, Morice entered the room.

Of all the men with whom Monk was brought into contact, during those troublous days, no one shared his confidence so much as the man who had just come in. Member for Plymouth in the Long Parliament, he had been expelled from the House of Commons twelve years earlier, in company with the majority of the members, at the time of Pride's Purge. Monk had known him many years before, when they were both men of Devon, Morice in fact being a connection. After the General reached London at the conclusion of his great march he felt the need of a wise counsellor, a man of balanced judgment, a statesman ; he believed that Morice had those qualifications to a remarkable degree ; he sent for him out of the West. With Morice to London came a cousin of Monk's, Sir John Grenville, member of that great Bideford family, which rendered yeoman service to the nation during centuries of naval warfare. Grenville was a pronounced Royalist ; he was known to be in touch with Charles, and had sought again and again to influence Monk in the direction of his own political faith, but the wary General had so far kept him at arm's length.

In Morice's clear-cut, intellectual face was a look of eager anticipation ; his eyes expressed satisfaction and hope ; his whole bearing that of a man strung up to high endeavour. Monk, still sitting in his place, glanced at his friend, his own eyes expressed no answering animation, much less satisfaction ; to an unobservant spectator they might have seemed dull, almost unintelligent ; really what was written there was disillusionment, the mental weariness of a man who walked a difficult pathway, trusting but few, for the simple reason that but few were worthy of trust.

Morice shot the bolt of the door behind him ; then he advanced to the table, and laid a paper before the General.

"It has come to that," he said tersely.

Monk did not answer ; he had not taken the manuscript up ; it was written in large legible characters, and his sight was excellent. He seemed disinclined to touch it, as if contact with the paper would imply the first step in a course of action ; nevertheless, with knitted brows, he took in its purport. A verse of Scripture came into his mind ; he had heard a sermon on it from one of the Sectaries years ere this ; the sermon had long been forgotten, buried, doubtless, under the weight of many similar discourses, not all in accordance with the mind of one listener, at any rate ; but the text had stuck—

"In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird."

If Monk were a bird at all, he must have been an eagle of the largest kind, a very king of the air; the simile which would occur to most people would be rather a pit, covered loosely with straw and leaves, into which it was hoped that some great beast of prey would fall, and so become captive.

Monk turned to Morice. "You have this on sure testimony?" he inquired.

"The most absolute."

It was evidence that the Leaders of the Parliamentary party were planning Monk's downfall, and the settlement of the nation under a Council of three, of which Sir Harry Vane was to be the President. Monk's services counted for nothing; his power and prestige, the popularity he enjoyed in the country all told against him; above all, the suspicion that he secretly favoured the return of the Stuarts.

General Monk sat back in his chair and crossed his arms; his eyes were closed; not a muscle of his strong face moved; he might have been asleep.

Morice did not stir; he hardly seemed to breathe; his glance travelled over the room; it rested on the General's sword hanging on the wall, and there remained fascinated; he was wondering what those moments, perchance of hesitation, certainly of consideration, would bring forth; in which scale would that sword be cast; would this man who had already proved himself so great in emergency rise to meet this fresh issue? No man knew better than Morice

how deeply was Monk's mind imbued with the motto "Ich Dien" ; it had been no pose, no pretence, when throughout he had said : "I am not the master, I am only the servant" ; when he had declared that the government of the country was in the hands of the Council of State, and his duty only to carry out their will. In obedience to this, he had even offended the great City of London ; wounded it in its most sensitive part ; yet he had suspected underneath, and now knew absolutely, that when he was ordered to use the military at his disposal against the city, the intention was to undermine the General's own popularity, and strike a blow against his personal prestige.

Now he himself was doomed, unless——

Monk opened his eyes and looked at Morice. "The die is cast," he said ; "I will see Grenville."

Morice breathed like a man who had been in a semi-stifling air, and suddenly felt a fresh wind blow upon his face.

"Thank God !" he murmured.

"The Devil has had more to do with it," Monk commented grimly ; "the Devil who makes men lie and cheat, when they could get their ends far more securely by honesty and open dealing."

Monk brought his closed fist heavily down on the oaken table.

Morice was surprised ; never had he seen Monk so moved, so disturbed from his usual calm ; it was

the result not of an hour nor of a day, but the slow aggregation of usage, extending over a long period.

"No one must know of this," the General remarked after a pause; "I will go to the private Cabinet after midnight; you will apprise Grenville, and conduct me there; say nothing of what I intend, merely caution him to absolute secrecy."

"Of that you may be assured," Morice interrupted.

Monk nodded. "I believe so," he said, "or I should not place myself in his hands; nevertheless, warn him afresh."

"I will see to it;" so saying, Morice turned and went hastily from the room, almost as if he were afraid that the General would reverse his decision.

An hour passed, during which Monk sat without moving; the paper which Morice had brought still lay by his side; now he took it up and read it, carefully, until he could have recited every word. He rose and went to the mantelpiece; a heavy silver candlestick containing a lighted candle, now burnt half-way down, was at either end; Monk held the paper to the flame of one of these until it was burnt in his hands; he seemed to take a certain satisfaction in doing it, as he might have thrown it on the open fire in the hearth; upon the latter he flung a log, then turned back again to the table, drew writing materials near to himself, and began slowly to express his thoughts on paper. Every now and again he studied the manuscript as if he were

about to leave off, but, after some hesitation, commenced afresh.

In this way another hour passed and midnight drew on.

The General lifted his head, lay down his pen, sat alert, listening; in spite of his age no man was quicker to detect a sound than himself. He had heard footfalls coming in his direction, the clink of spurs; a premonition came to him of news, news for which he was waiting.

Again there was a knock at the door; this time with less of assurance.

"Come in."

Captain Darcy entered. His face was flushed, his clothes were travel-stained, his whole appearance suggested a rapid ride.

"I am glad to see you, Darcy," the General said; his face had lightened. Morice represented that aspect of life with which the General was least in sympathy—politics; Darcy, on the contrary, was the embodiment of Monk's first love—war. In statecraft he had equals, superiors; in camp and field he reigned alone, without a peer, without a rival.

"I come from Colonel Dick Ingoldsby."

"Yes?" Monk showed more eagerness than usual.

"He has Lambert under his hand, and is bringing him to London; I came on with the news."

"That is well done."

Monk sat back for several minutes, thinking; one impediment was removed, the cards were playing into his hands. Like all West Country men he was a fatalist; had Lambert escaped he would have hesitated, even at this supreme moment, as to the course of conduct upon which he had decided with much reluctance; as it was, he felt that the new departure was being justified by fate.

Presently he came back. "Were you with the expedition?"

Briefly Darcy told him the whole circumstances; his sighting Lambert from the watch-tower of Grangeland Abbey; the night expedition; the capture of the Puritan leader in Ebenezer Holden's field.

At this point in the narrative Monk, who had been listening silently, interrupted with a question, "What became of the rest of his force?"

"Colonel Ingoldsby followed your direction, sir; they surrendered their arms, and swore not to band themselves together again for three years; then they were allowed to go free; Lambert was conveyed to the Abbey under a small guard; he lay there that night."

Monk looked at Darcy shrewdly. "Was he placed in a certain chamber, close to the chapel, in the grounds of the Abbey?" he inquired.

"No, sir, in a strong room of the house itself."

"Ah! I suppose Sir Evelyn Lee would have thought it a desecration, as it had once been occupied by more distinguished guests, and those of quite other ways of thinking."

Darcy remembered a certain story told by mine host of the White Horse.

"Colonel Ingoldsby expects to arrive to-morrow, with his prisoner."

"He will come opportunely; I have a review in Hyde Park of the Militia, and train-bands of the City; General Lambert is not a favourite of these gentlemen."

As Monk was speaking, some clock in the Palace struck the hour of midnight; immediately afterwards, for the third time that night, there was a knock at the door. In response to an invitation, Morice again entered.

He started with surprise on finding that the General was not alone.

"This is Captain Darcy, Morice; he can be silent on occasion; you can trust him."

The new-comer bowed. "It is your affair, General," he said.

"Yes, I will be responsible." Monk then turned to his aide-de-camp. "I am about to take a step which is none of my seeking, upon which I am driven by those who have not served me well; as you have arrived you shall accompany me." Then to Morice he added, "This gentleman has come with

the news of the capture of General Lambert; he will be delivered back again in safe custody to the Tower to-morrow."

Morice's eyes brightened considerably: "That is the best news we have had for some time, General."

Monk nodded. "Lead on, sir, and we will follow."

Without a word Morice passed through the door, which had been left open; Monk followed; Darcy bringing up the rear, greatly wondering upon what extraordinary errand they were going, at such an hour; his knowledge of General Monk's character, and the great caution he ever manifested made him the more surprised.

The Palace seemed to be all abed. A lantern hung on a bracket near to the General's door; Morice took this down and advanced with it in his hand; every other light in Whitehall had been put out.

They threaded two or three passages in silence and darkness, except for the flickering yellow rays of the lamp which Morice bore aloft.

Darcy had been riding fast; a great weariness was upon him when he mounted the stairway to the General's room; now his weariness had gone, a curious alertness had taken its place; he seemed to be girt about by mystery, by the shadows of the past. Along these passages doubtless Charles the

Martyr had often walked; he had gone through them to that ever memorable scene before the windows of the Palace. Darcy seemed to feel the touch of unseen hands; did he dream? was he awake or asleep? Monk of all men had appeared least likely to be one of that mysterious midnight procession.

Morice stopped in the centre of a tapestried-wall, touched something, disclosed a door, then held up the lamp.

"Go on, William, we will follow," Monk directed.

They entered a passage which smelt musty and damp; from some window high up, evidently unglazed, a breath of cold night air penetrated, making the light in the lantern flicker and smoke. Darcy touched the wall and found it damp; he felt sure it was part of the external fabric of the Palace.

Once more there was a pause, while all three waited in their respective positions; again a door opened with a lock which clicked, probably governed by a spring, such as the old locksmiths well understood how to make, for purposes of concealment.

They entered a small chamber, clearly the ante-room of a more important apartment, it was devoid of furniture, and the same was true of the room to which it led; a table and two chairs had been placed near to the fire-place in the inner apartment, evidently brought from somewhere else; a fire of logs, blazing

brightly in the hearth, threw its flickering rays over walls, ceiling, and floor. A man had been sitting down, apparently awaiting an arrival; he now stood up, looking with some curiosity in the direction of the door.

Morice stepped on one side to allow Monk to enter first; the tall man who had been waiting uttered a cry, an exclamation which expressed mingled surprise and gratification.

It was Sir John Grenville.

Monk and he eyed one another across the intervening space which separated them; Morice and Darcy stood with their backs against the door, holding their breath, conscious that they were assisting at an interview which was to have, in all probability, a momentous effect. The hour, the secrecy observed in their coming, the fact that Monk represented the one dominant note of power, the concentration of authority, all pointed to the significance of the act in which they were engaged.

The General had this advantage over Grenville, in that the former knew to whom he was coming, whereas the latter had only been brought there by the one lure which was certain to effect its purpose, namely, that his errand would be of service to the exile; he had certainly not expected a visit from General Monk himself, who had hitherto eluded all his efforts to arrange a meeting and discussion.

There was one other thing which, whether they

knew it or not, impressed all four; this apartment in which they met was the royal bedroom of the Stuarts when they occupied Whitehall Palace; James I. had died here; Charles had used it for many years; as regards the future, to this apartment by means of the secret stairway and passage, came Father Petre to administer the last rites of the Church to Charles II.

It was a remarkable stroke of irony, that this room of all others should be the one selected for the meeting of the great Republican General, and the Royalist gentleman, who between them were to arrange for the restoration of the Stuarts.

This, however, was not yet; Monk advanced a pawn in the game of chess, which he was about to play with his keen-witted antagonist.

"I understand, Cousin, that you wish to communicate with me privately on an affair of State."

Grenville bowed. "I have wished it for some time, but have lacked the opportunity."

"You have it now, Sir John, and can speak without fear——" At the word Grenville lifted his head, and squared his shoulders, while his left hand went to the handle of his sword.

Monk smiled: "We are aware of your courage, Cousin," he said, quietly, "but in these days the bravest of us has to exhibit a certain caution."

Grenville shrugged his shoulders: "It may be carried too far, General," he suggested.

“What is it you have to propose?”

“What the nation wants more than anything else.”

“And that is——?”

“The recall of the rightful Majesty of these Realms.”

Monk looked angry. “You speak bold words, sir,” he said, “what you propose is nothing less than treason against the acting Government of the Country: are you not afraid to suggest so much to me in whose hands is the sword of justice and punishment?”

“I am not afraid; I have risked my life too often to care a snap about another jeopardy. You speak, General, of loyalty; I know of only one loyalty, and that is to my King——” he saluted as if he were present——“loyalty forsooth! are your masters the Council of State loyal to each other, are they loyal to you? does not Haslerig plot against Vane, and Vane against Lambert? are they not all conspiring together to take away the powers with which you have been intrusted, so as to leave them free to grind this nation under the heel of a worse despotism than Oliver’s own?”

Monk made a gesture of authority, which no one could assume better than he; his face had changed; he drew nearer to Grenville, and stretched out his hand; the latter grasped it with much surprise.

“What you say, Cousin, I know to be true; I did

but try you ; I am about to send you on an errand ; it is one which will require courage and caution."

"I am prepared to use both."

"I believe it, or I should not be here. You will go to Brussels, and seek Charles Stuart out in his lodging ; tell him you come from me."

"That will be the best news he has heard for many a long day."

Monk went on without heeding the interruption, although his kindling eye showed it had not been without effect. "You will suggest to His Majesty two things : the first, that he should remove at once into Portuguese Territory ; I suggest Breda ; I have reason to know that if the probability of a restoration were to get about, the Governments of Spain and France would seize the person of Charles as a hostage to obtain terms for themselves."

"I will mention that, General."

Sir John Grenville now understood one of the motives underlying this visit of Monk at the dead of night ; patriotism ! Monk loved his country, a plot against it touched him in his most susceptible quarter ; foreign politics, quite as much as the needs of England itself, had to do with the General's sudden change of front.

There was a pause. After a while Grenville said : "You have not yet told me the second communication I have to make to His Majesty."

"You will inform him that I am about to issue an

ultimatum to the Council of State enforcing the return of the banished Members of Parliament to the House of Commons, and following upon that, immediately, a general election."

Sir John Grenville nodded: "Such a Parliament would recall the King instantly."

"Of that I am well aware," Monk assented. "To prepare the way for that return I wish it suggested to the King that he should issue a declaration as to his intentions."

"His Majesty would be guided by anything you advise, General," Grenville remarked diplomatically.

Monk took the paper from his vest, which he had prepared with so much care earlier in the night; he handed it to Grenville.

"Read that aloud," he directed.

Sir John did so with some surprise.

"Now do it again."

Grenville repeated the text of the manuscript.

Monk stretched out his hand: "Give it to me back," he said.

Sir John did so.

"Now recite it."

Grenville reproduced it, practically word for word.

"You have a good memory, Cousin?"

"Excellent, for things which interest me!"

"That is well." Monk strode to the fire-place, threw the paper he had so carefully prepared on to a blazing log, pressed it in with the toe of his boot,

then watched and waited silently, until every scrap of the paper was consumed by the flames.

Then he turned back to Grenville, and held out his hand before departing. "You have not asked anything for yourself," Grenville suggested.

"I am acting for my country," Monk answered with dignity.

The feeling of the three auditors expressed itself by a sound they could not altogether suppress ; Monk had always seemed to them great, but the true measure of that outstanding quality of his had never been so apparent, even to the men who knew him best, as it did that midnight hour in the royal bedroom of Whitehall.

Not another word was said, not even a good-night, or a God-speed to Grenville, about to go on his dangerous errand. It seemed as if nothing more could be said, after that one remark, and his answer.

All the world knows what followed on that midnight visit ; how Sir John Grenville sped on his errand, warned Charles of his danger, just in time to ensure his fitting ; the Declaration of Breda in those wise terms which Monk had advised during his meeting with Grenville ; the determination with which Monk compelled the Republican Council of State to bend to his will ; the great moment on the morrow when twenty thousand men were reviewed in Hyde Park, in the very height of which Lambert was led past, his scabbard without a sword, a prisoner

on his way back to the Tower; Cardinal Mazarin eventually dying of chagrin to think that this soldier of England, no statesman, just with his plain homely wit had frustrated the great scheme of the most astute brain in the world.

CHAPTER XI

THE RETURN OF THE KING

THE month of May was drawing to a close.

Above the white cliffs of Dover was assembled a vast crowd of people; the town had overflowed its banks; every room from corner cupboard to attic which could possibly be squeezed to afford accommodation for a human being, had been utilized; in addition tents were erected along the foreland in both directions. One great central marquee was gay with streamers and bore the Royal flag attached to its gilded summit.

Many thousands of eyes looked out over the Channel to catch a first glimpse of the sails of that great fleet, which was bringing Charles back to his own again, after all those years of wandering. Loyal hearts throbbed in unison; never had the nation been so united, the enthusiasm so great, universal hopes so deeply stirred. Here and there among the vast concord of spectators were a few with sour faces, soldiers of Cromwell's old army, seasoned veterans of Copredy Bridge and Worcester; Puritans to whom the day, the occasion, and the joyous crowd, were

anathema. Robert Darcy marked one such face especially, and recognized it at once ; it was that of Ebenezer Holden, who still wore the snuff-coloured surtout, leathern breeches, and high-crowned hat, with narrow brim, which demonstrated alike his religious and political faith. He nodded sullenly to Darcy, for the recognition was mutual. Robert was one of a small group which included his brother, mother, Sir Evelyn Lee and Lucille ; he had come to Dover in attendance on General Monk ; it formed the conclusion of his official connection with the old soldier. Monk was about to surrender the office he had held, by appointment of the Council of State, into the hands of Charles, to receive from him a new rank and position. He was to be made Duke of Albemarle and Master of the Horse ; in this capacity he would not require an aide-de-camp. Darcy could have received, had he chosen, another office of dignity and emoluments, indeed it was pressed upon him, but he had made up his mind to sever his connection with the Court, or rather not to exchange military service for civil ; his own estates needed attention ; his mother looked to him for companionship. In the distance he saw a prospect which, if it were attained, would, he felt sure, more than compensate for any failure of ambition which might attend his refusal at this juncture.

“ Your friends have gained the day, Captain Darcy,” Holden said.

"You mean all England is about to receive what it ardently longs for," Darcy corrected.

"A fickle people," the Puritan replied, "unstable as water they shall not prevail. The day will come when those who shout this morning will groan for their folly and misdeeds. In this young man, whom you call Charles Stuart, King of England, runs vicious sap, blood which turns to sourness; it is a soil which grows weeds, not flowers or fruit; and whatever he promises to-day he will do the opposite, after his kind, to-morrow."

"You are a prophet of evil, Holden," Sir Evelyn Lee put in.

"I am a prophet of truth, although you may not live to see it," and with a slight touch to his narrow-brimmed hat the Puritan took himself off, walking with head bowed over his shoulders, elbowing aside the gaily dressed throng which jeered him as he passed.

Hardly had this incident terminated before a cheer arose, taken up by other voices until it swelled into a great acclaim; those on the highest ground had caught sight of coming sails. With a favourable wind at the back of them the majestic convoy bore down upon Dover.

An hour passed, then another, yet the interest was so sustained and breathless it seemed like a few minutes. The ships were decked from stem to stern with flags and bunting; salutes thundered out from shore to navy and from navy back to shore.

A boat shot out, filled with officers in brilliant uniforms; it made for the landing-stage; in the centre sat a young man barely thirty, dressed in a violet mantle, fastened with a clasp of some order, and a star on his breast which scintillated in the rays of the sun. Dignity, and a certain Royal carriage marked him as he stepped out on to the landing-stage, assisted by the Admiral of the Fleet; his face was dark and swarthy, his nostrils wide apart, his eyes somewhat sunken; although but thirty he carried the appearance of one who had been through much, endured much, as many hoped one who had learnt much.

Charles had reached his native land, and stepped on its soil with an air of some assurance, yet with a look not wholly free from anxiety as he came forward; with him, a little behind, walked his brother, and at their rear, again, the officers who had accompanied him from the ship.

Then another shout arose, hardly less in volume, greeting some one advancing from the landward side; that martial figure sitting square on the great horse, the face which had never betrayed a secret, the man who had earned for himself the admiration of a whole nation by his unswerving courage and absolute faithfulness, by his wisdom and moderation; the man who had become the greatest subject in the State; in other words General Monk rode to meet his master.

Men wondered what he would do ; how the King-maker would greet his King ; every one recognized that without him the return of Charles would have been delayed, even if it had ever happened.

How would Monk receive the King ?

How would the King receive the General ?

These were the questions which shone out of every eye in that assemblage, as the two approached one another.

Behind Monk rode all the great men of the Realm, historic titles, and historic names, Dukes, Earls, great Commoners ; men who had stood on one side during the years of Cromwell's power and who had come forth now, to greet the one person to whom they recognized that they owed allegiance. Yet not on any of these, great as they were, signal as was the opportunity, did the attention of the crowd rest for one moment on that day.

Monk alone absorbed all thought, Monk and his King.

Lucille turned and looked at Darcy ; she remembered the time when her hand had rested on the General's arm, and she had felt something of his greatness, now demonstrated beyond the cavil of all.

" You are proud of him," she whispered.

" Yes," he answered, " very."

As he spoke he felt his attention suddenly averted ; Lucille noticed it, and her eyes followed the direction

of his ; behind Monk, in the gay cavalcade, rode the Dukes of Buckingham and Manchester, side by side, each of them dressed in the very height of fashion, Buckingham, as always, the handsomest man in the company.

The Duke's eyes were fixed on Robert Darcy ; he vouchsafed no bow of recognition, but the glance of hatred which he cast could not be misunderstood.

He had neither forgiven nor forgotten.

Lucille felt herself shiver even in that warm sunlight, some premonition came over her of impending trouble, not for herself, but for the man by her side, who was to her something different from all others, although, as yet, she did not realize in what that difference consisted.

Buckingham looked away, and the spell of his glance was gone.

The air was rent with a great shout. Monk dismounted from his horse and advanced towards Charles, then he sank on one knee into the sand of the shore, and, raising the hand of his Royal master, kissed it as the most obedient of his subjects.

Charles was deeply moved ; what he expected no man knew, the homage touched his impressionable soul to the quick.

Monk had conquered his master, as before he had conquered the whole of England.

Lucille, looking on at the scene, was carried back in imagination to a very different one ; she saw the

same young man, now receiving the homage of his subjects, a fugitive, appealing to her, a mere child, for help in his effort to escape his enemies. The ruined chapel at the Abbey rose up before her ; the hidden door into the secret chamber ; her father's expedition in the night-time ; the search of the house by the Puritan troops ; all those mysterious happenings, those fears, which had indelibly impressed themselves on her immature experience.

This was the issue of that far-off time ; this the outcome ; those cheering voices of thousands of loyal subjects, the gathering of the nobles, the stately fleet, lying in the water-way ; all England waiting breathlessly for the coming of the King to his own.

Lucille looked into her father's face, she saw joy and satisfaction written there, a certain vicarious pride ; he had played his small part when called upon, and was thankful now the opportunity had been afforded him, he showed it in the kindling of his eye, in the angle of his chin ; he would ask for nothing in return ; now that the whole power and patronage of the Realm rested in this young man's hands Sir Evelyn wanted nothing from him ; there would be no reminder on his part of danger run in the past, of service rendered. To have done it was his reward.

As the girl thought these things her hand went

insensibly to the bodice of her dress, underneath she could feel the pressure of a ring, given her on that night of vivid memories, now the signet of a King; she had worn it there ever since; it meant more to her than ever.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

AT DARCY COURT

IN the smaller drawing-room of a fine house at Kingston, Lady Darcy sat at her embroidery frame; she worked at it very intermittently, it was an excuse rather than an actual occupation; her thoughts were busy, when her fingers were idle.

It was an afternoon in early September. Three years had passed since the coming of Charles to Dover; since that triumphal march of his to his capital; amid the plaudits of a nation.

The disillusionment had begun. The Royal student had learnt just enough of Statecraft to guard his own interests, to prevent the catastrophe which overtook his less pliant brother, afterwards; but the lessons of those years of wandering and exile, which the wisest and best of his subjects had hoped to find expressed in the character of Charles, were far to seek. The one thing which remained, overmastering everything else, was the enjoyment of ease, of com-

fort, of luxury, after the lean years, the days of penury, which had gone before. The needs, the hopes, the aspirations of a great nation, a nation which at any rate had been respected and feared in the days of the Commonwealth, these meant nothing to the present Royal pleasure-lover, whose sole aim was to hold secure that which he had so hardly won.

The strong hand of Oliver Cromwell was gone, the streets of London, dirty and ill-lighted, were given up to the rule of footpads, and rufflers of a higher rank, after dark; highwaymen infested the main roads; places were bought and sold in the open market; even the judges were obsequious to the Royal will; still worse, were open to the influence of a well-filled purse in the administration of the laws of the land; the poor and the weak suffered, the rich and the powerful went scot free.

There were honourable exceptions, who only served to prove the rule.

Lady Darcy had been thinking a little of this condition of affairs that afternoon—as well as of other things.

Robert, attended by Longstaffe, no longer Corporal, but simple Will, as he too had left the Service, had gone to the city. Lady Darcy had missed him during his absence; she was longing for his return; brawls and duels were of frequent occurrence, and although her son was well able to take care of himself, the mother's heart had ever a certain anxiety lurking in

the corners when her son paid one of his infrequent visits to London.

On the morrow they were about to start, in the great coach, for Grangeland Abbey ; a week later would be Lucille's nineteenth birthday, which they hoped to celebrate with her. Lady Darcy had had some difficulty in making up her mind for the expedition ; she was in indifferent health, her beautiful face, with its ivory-whiteness of complexion, against the silver sheen of her hair which she wore in a mob-cap tied with puce-coloured ribbons, increasingly indicated the condition of her health ; she knew herself that the days of her life were numbered ; her physician had spoken quite plainly to her that very morning, not for the first time. Lady Darcy longed to see Robert settled before the inevitable day of separation arrived. She knew that the journey they were about to make represented a definite purpose on her son's part ; he had seen Mistress Lucille Lee at least twice or three times every year since his first visit, when he had gone, wounded, to be tended at the Abbey ; although no express confidence had been exchanged, in so many words, between his mother and himself, the former had no doubt as to the hope and intention which now mastered his whole life. Her anxieties were on the other side ; even to her, Robert seemed strangely old for his years, grave, thoughtful, almost sad ; he took life with a certain solemnity, a gravity more fitting middle or old age

than comparative youth ; was it likely a young girl's fancy would be stimulated, her affection aroused for one whom she might regard as old enough in feeling, if not in years, to be her father ?

Lady Darcy, knowing something of other girls, doubted.

Robert, her younger son, absorbed Lady Darcy's hopes and affections, almost altogether ; her elder son was married ; he was of a totally different temperament, taking after his father, fond of field sports, fox hunting, hare coursing, farming his own acres. She had never found in him that responsive sympathy which she had received in full measure from Robert ; then, in addition, they had lived together in perfect harmony since he retired from military service.

The sunlight came in through the French windows, which Robert had copied from a house he admired on the Seine near Paris. Lady Darcy could see the grass-sward which came up close to the gravel path before the walls : below that, again, gleamed the waters of the Thames.

The splash of oars sounded on the soft afternoon air. Lady Darcy drew herself up to an attitude of listening, of tense attention ; many barges and wherries as well as larger craft passed up and down the river opposite Darcy Court, as the house was called, but something told her that these oars indicated the approach of Robert's barge. Nearer they came, then stopped. Lady Darcy settled herself

back ; Robert would be within in a moment ; a faint flush suffused her cheeks, indicating the anxiety she had had before, the satisfaction she felt now ; only an invalid knows to the full what the stress of waiting may mean ; ill health stimulates the imagination, especially on its darker side ; thoughts take colour from the physical conditions of those who give them harbourage.

Robert Darcy turned the catch of the window, and entered ; he had a small parcel in his left hand.

Faultlessly, but quietly dressed, he looked what he was, a gentleman *par excellence*. Of late he had sunk something of the soldier in his mien and deportment and taken on the suggestion of the scholar, almost the recluse. His friendship with the neighbouring rector, a Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, had stimulated his interests in those classical studies which he had enjoyed as a boy, but necessarily left neglected during his years of campaigning, but this was not the principal or primary stimulus, Lucille's tastes in the way of reading and culture had much more to do with it ; she was brought up to read and admire the poetry and prose of two or three languages ; Robert found her very different from the ladies who formed the society round Richmond and Kingston, they cared less and less for books, and followed the affectation of the Court, which ran more and more to routs, dances, and river parties.

Robert crossed the room and kissed his mother,

first on one cheek, then on the other, finally on her white forehead.

"I am so glad you have returned."

He did not answer as speedily as was his wont ; she looked up into his face and read there some disturbance, or rather the reflection of something which had affected him.

"What has annoyed you ?" she asked, with a note of anxiety in her voice.

He smiled upon her, and when he smiled his face took on a note of softness, which removed the impression of rigidity, almost of harshness.

"How quick you are to read me ; I think you know me better, mother, than I know myself."

"Perhaps I have studied you more," she answered. "Tell me what it is," she added.

"I should like to have been in a quarrel, and I refrained."

"I am glad," she replied ; "it is often the higher courage of the two, to hold back and restrain yourself."

"I tasked mine to the full," Robert responded, walking away and standing by the window, looking out over the river. He could see his barge disappearing round the corner, the servants taking it in the direction of the boathouse, which was built where the bank shelved to the water's edge.

Lady Darcy marked with a mother's satisfaction, not by any means for the first time, the strong lines

of his shape, finely moulded, set off by the careful dressing, the cut of his velvet coat ; few men could match him in the strength and grace of his figure.

Yes, there was one, and of him Robert was thinking that very moment. He turned round, and said :

" His Grace of Buckingham splashed me with mud, just after noon to-day ; he was riding past with his friends, His Majesty in the centre, when I came out of Lambert's coffee-house, in the Strand."

" It may have been an accident," his mother suggested.

" It was intentional ; he passed me with a laugh, but riding quickly was gone before I could follow ; I was on foot, of course, my horse at the mews ; if it had not been that to do so would have delayed our journey on the morrow, I would have sought him out and demanded satisfaction."

Very stern Robert looked as he said these words.

A contraction, almost a shudder passed over Lady Darcy's face and neck : " I am glad we are going," she said, " I would not have you quarrel with him of all men ; he has the King's ear, and can do with him what he wills."

" I am not afraid," Robert answered ; " however, he goes scatheless—this time," he added, almost under his breath.

Lady Darcy changed the subject, glad to escape from it.

" What is in that parcel?" she asked ; " a book ?"

"Yes, a volume of Master Dryden's poems, just published." He brought it to his mother, removing the outer wrapping; it was bound in white vellum, with gold lettering on the side and back.

Lady Darcy gave a little cry of admiration; then she smiled.

"I guess for whom it is intended," she said.

"Yes, mother! a birthday present."

"And bridal as well," she added, "in its pure whiteness."

Robert flushed a little under the healthy olive of his skin.

"It may be," he answered.

"I trust it will," she responded, following his thoughts even more than his words.

That night Lady Darcy slept but indifferently, and was glad when the morning sunshine gave her the excuse of ringing for her maid to bring her chocolate, and then assist with her dressing. Speculation, coupled with some anxiety, had occupied her waking hours; would Robert succeed in the quest upon which he was about to embark with all seriousness? She understood the depths of his nature, the strength and fibre of his tenacity; if he succeeded, if he overcame what were perhaps the maiden prejudices of a young girl, Lady Darcy had no fear for the result; no one could live with her son without being impressed with the fineness, the nobility, of his character.

But if he failed ; if friendship were offered him, love denied ; respect, but no vestige of passion. Lady Darcy feared for the issue, lest that vein of brooding, of melancholy, of severity which underlay the tenderness of which he was capable, should absorb the whole man, and turn him into a misanthrope.

By the time she was ready to go down-stairs Robert was already afoot in the garden ; he had instructions to give to the head servants, without and within, for he and Lady Darcy would be away at least six weeks.

CHAPTER II

THE WOOD

LADY DARCY and her son travelled in the family coach ; the former's maid riding inside with them. It was drawn by four horses of stout build, carefully selected by Robert himself. A footman stood on the dickey at the back or rode in front by the side of the coachman, John Coleman, who had been in Lady Darcy's service for many years. Longstaffe brought up the rear, or occasionally led the way, riding with Moonlight as a spare horse, so that his master could exchange to the saddle whenever he was minded.

The roads were fairly good out of London, and as long as they kept to the principal arteries of traffic, but would get much worse during the last forty or fifty miles, when they would be traversing a less frequented district.

Coleman knew the way well ; he had taken it at least half-a-dozen times before, backwards and forwards ; all the men were armed, even the coachman having a blunderbuss, resting on a leathern projection, in front of his driving-seat.

Not a road, at that period, but was infested by

lawless men, highwaymen, and footpads ; some of them discharged soldiers unable, or unwilling to get an honest living ; a few gentlemen, by extraction, even scions of the nobility, thought it no degradation to steal a purse if it were done after a gentleman-like fashion ; who redressed the inequalities of social life by stealing from the wealthy to distribute largesse to the starving. The King's word, and the lawful authority counted for but little ; even London itself was given up to lawlessness after nightfall ; in the country a man who could not defend his own was likely very soon to have nothing of his own to defend.

Robert Darcy had put away much of his air of melancholy as soon as the journey began ; action always suited him, it lent vivacity to his face, and an air of determination to his person. He divided his time between a vigilant interest in the road they traversed, the incidents and scenes connected with it, and an incessant care for his mother's comfort and well-being. It had been arranged that the journey should be spread over three days so that no undue fatigue should be caused to Lady Darcy, who was incapable of prolonged exertion in travelling.

Lady Darcy herself seemed better than she had done for some time ; she, too, was stimulated by change of scene, although a certain anxiety made itself evident, especially as the afternoons wore on, for fear they should be overtaken by darkness, before reaching the previously arranged destination.

The days were open and fine ; they passed many travellers on the road coming from and going towards the metropolis ; long lines of pack-horses, with their merry, half-gipsy muleteers, who cracked their whips and their jokes simultaneously ; here and there the sumptuously appointed coach, with six horses, postilions and out-riders, of some great noble or officer of state on his way to Westminster ; carriers' carts, full of people as well as goods, journeying from one town to another ; grooms exercising horses ; once they came across a huntsman with his pack of hounds and whips, on the way to a meet ; all these things served to lighten the journey, and interest Lady Darcy.

Two days passed without a hitch in the arrangement. On the second night they lay at the Royal Stag, a well-appointed inn, which could accommodate from seventy to eighty guests, standing at the junction of four roads, a well-known place of call for travellers to the north, and westwards to the Welsh border.

By the evening of the following day they hoped to make Grangeland Abbey. At the outset, when they left the Royal Stag, Robert rode by the side of Longstaffe ; impatience and eagerness to get to his journey's end, an unusual restlessness was upon his spirit ; so much would depend, as regards his happiness, upon the outcome of the visit. The nearer he approached to the Abbey the more uncertain he was

as to the success of his suit ; he was glad of the exercise of riding, the motion of Moonlight under him to distract his thoughts.

They had now struck off the main road into one not so well found ; the track in the centre was fairly well kept, but the coach-wheels often sank deep on one side or the other into ruts, which had been made by heavy wagons carrying grain from the harvest, just over in this district ; on the tall hedgerows were many indications of what had passed, stalks of oats and wheat, which the briars, stretching out their tendrils, had seized and plucked from the laden wagons as they passed.

They halted midday at Emsworth, a village some dozen miles from Grangeland ; here they took their meal, and Lady Darcy rested for a while afterwards. When they started afresh the brightness of the day had gone, the sky was overcast, heavy clouds banked themselves above the horizon, a few drops of rain fell at intervals. Darcy had taken his place inside the coach ; he leant out of the window to urge Coleman to get the best pace possible out of the horses.

After half-an-hour the rain came down steadily, the going developed difficulties ; they descended the bottom of a ravine, and found a stream of water, generally it was only small and limpid, but that afternoon it boiled and surged as if some freshet had come down from the neighbouring hills. Coleman had some difficulty in inducing the leaders to face

it; they backed and reared; Lady Darcy cried out, her nerves being highly strung. Robert sprang from the coach and went to the head of one of the horses, while Longstaffe galloped up and encouraged the other with words, but Moonlight also took it into her head to be restive, and he could do little by way of assistance.

At length they surmounted the difficulty; the coach was brought through the stream, and the horses began to ascend the steeper slope on the other side. Darcy did not get into the coach again, but walked to relieve the burden.

The incident, unimportant in itself, helped to delay them while the weather caused the night to come on quicker than usual at that time of the year. After another hour's slow driving, the wheelers showing signs of fatigue, they came to a wood where the overhanging trees although affording protection against the rain made the darkness greater.

Suddenly, a voice called out, "Halt; you proceed at your peril!"

From both sides of the coach simultaneously horsemen sprang out; they must have been lying in wait in a pathway, which bisected the road, cutting the wood at right angles to it.

The strangers, who had thus suddenly sprung upon the party, were wearing masks; one of them presented a horse-pistol at the coachman, another rode up to the window threatening the occupants and

demanding their valuables, a third turned to deal with Longstaffe, who was riding at this time just behind the coach.

Captain Darcy, himself, walking was not perceived ; his pistols had been left in the coach but his sword was by his side, and his dagger ready to hand.

Coleman, threatened by the barrel of a weapon which covered his breast, could only do as he was bid ; almost insensibly he pulled up the horses ; the carriage came to a stand.

At that moment Darcy sprang forward and with the flat of his sword struck the stranger, who was bending down at the glass of the coach-window, and sent him spinning from his horse. He waited for no more, but ran towards the highwayman, who with his pistol had been the means of stopping them. Robert shouted to him ; and as he turned round struck up the pistol, which the man at once fired ; the charge entered the branch of a tree overhead, Darcy then gave him the point of his sword under the right arm. He plunged forward, throwing up his hands, the reins slipped from his grasp, he lurched and fell heavily, uttering a groan. Longstaffe was engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with the third robber, but the latter, whose face was turned in the direction of the coach, realized that the game was up ; he turned and galloped away into the wood.

Robert turned instant attention to his mother ; he had heard her maid, Ruth Pennington, call out

shrilly when the commotion began, after that no sound had reached him from the interior of the coach, and of course his whole thoughts had been diverted to meeting and repelling the attack. Now anxiety for his mother absorbed him ; he ran to the window and looked in ; the sight that met his eyes frightened him more than anything he remembered in the whole of his life.

In the dim afternoon light, with the rain pattering on the top of the coach, Darcy saw his mother's face deadly white ; she lay in the arms of the faithful servant, who had attended upon her for a great many years. For a moment he thought her dead, and an exclamation of anguish was wrung from him. Ruth heard, and understood it ; she looked across at him, and said, "My lady is only faint, sir."

"Thank God !" he uttered, then opened the door and sprang inside, seized his mother's hands, which lay limp on her lap and covered them with kisses.

In the meantime the footman had descended from the dickey ; he had been a passive spectator of the alarming incident, too paralyzed with surprise and fear to move. Longstaffe rode up, and got down from his horse ; he hitched up the two animals to the back of the coach and then came to inspect the fallen highwaymen. One man was only stunned, the side of his face swollen and disfigured by the blow Captain Darcy had administered. Longstaffe took him up, and flung him on to a low bank, which

divided the wood from the road: "He will be all right," he remarked to the footman, "but he will carry a pretty mark to the gallows."

The face of the other highwayman was quite different; Longstaffe saw at once that the wound he had received was fatal; he was still breathing, but his moments were numbered. They drew him with much greater care to a place by the side of his companion. Then Longstaffe went to the boot of the coach, opened his master's valise and took from it the same flask containing eau-de-vie, which had done duty on a precious occasion for Captain Darcy himself.

After administering the cordial the man opened his eyes, laughed, hiccoughed. "The game is up," he whispered, "I am done," he heaved a sigh, then it was over. Longstaffe closed the eyes and stood up.

"The master has not forgotten how to use his sword," was his comment to the footman. Then he went to the door of the coach to report what had happened and receive his orders.

By this time Lady Darcy had begun to recover consciousness; a faint flush suffused her cheeks; her eyes rested on her son, who was kneeling on the floor of the coach.

"You are safe?" she murmured in low tones which only just reached his ear.

"Quite!" he replied, "not a scratch; the affair is over, the robbers got the worst of it."

"Thank God!" she said; "it came so suddenly; I ought not to have been frightened, but you were not here; I did not know what was happening to you."

"It was a good thing I was not here, mother; I was able to do more from without."

While he spoke he was chafing her hands; she smiled upon him, and at the same time released herself from Ruth's arms, and sat up.

"You are a good son," she said, "and will make—a good husband."

The tenderness, the softness in Robert's eyes and mouth, which his mother's condition had brought there, made Lady Darcy feel what a wealth of affection lay beneath his usually cold, reserved manner.

Even at that moment she wondered whether he could show these characteristics to Lucille, so that she should appreciate a side of his character, of which the outside world suspected little or nothing.

Longstaffe's voice broke in: "I should like to speak to you for a moment, sir," he said.

"Certainly, I can come now," his master answered. Then he said to his mother: "We ought to be moving on immediately, if you feel equal to enduring the shaking of the coach, the road is not at all good for some distance."

"I am equal to anything now," she answered; "only too glad and thankful that you are safe and well."

Robert left the coach and conferred with Longstaffe.

It was decided to leave the body of the dead man just within the wood, and to send back a burying party when they reached the Abbey. The other man had regained consciousness and was sitting up; the two servants tied him with a rope and he was hoisted on the back of Moonlight, to the disgust of the mare, which showed her dislike to the burden by kicking out viciously.

When these dispositions were made, Robert got into the coach once more, the horses were whipped up, and a fresh start made for the Abbey, which was reached without adventure an hour later.

When they drove up to the entrance Sir Evelyn Lee and his daughter had already come out, hearing the sound of wheels.

Lucille ran down the steps, Darcy sprang out and stood by, while the girl's arms were thrown round Lady Darcy's neck. It was a pretty sight in the glamour of the lamplight from the great lantern over the entrance, the young girl and the old lady. Robert looked on with love and admiration in his eyes; then he remembered his courtesy to Sir Evelyn Lee; taking off his plumed hat, he ran up the steps and shook the baronet warmly by the hand.

Three years had made all the difference in both father and daughter, Sir Evelyn was looking frail and old; he had aged in a remarkable fashion from

the time he had lost his wife, the change was still more marked than it had been even a few months earlier, when Captain Darcy and he had parted.

Lucille, on the contrary, had matured into a most beautiful woman, her slim outlines filling up, her person and carriage taking on a dignity yet crowned by a rare modesty. She now came up the steps holding Lady Darcy's hand ; looking up, the girl caught Robert's eyes fixed upon her ; she smiled, then a certain consciousness came over her, the recognition of his admiration. She turned to Lady Darcy to hide her confusion :

"My father and I were anxious when the rain came on"—it had ceased to fall during the last half-hour—"and your coming was delayed."

Just as she said the words, Longstaffe rode up, with the highwayman strapped on Moonlight.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND RING .

It was Lucille's nineteenth birthday.

She awoke with a pleasurable sensation. The morning sunlight was streaming through the latticed blinds ; a robin, first and last of the songsters of the year, piped a merry tune from a giant pear-tree, which hung its fruit almost within reaching distance of the girl's arm, had she stretched her hand forth to take toll, but the ripeness, and so the temptation, was not yet.

Lucille could not altogether account, perhaps she did not wish to do so, for the surging joy of her morning reflections ; she knew it was good to be young, albeit not too young, to feel the freshness of life, like the freshness of that September morning ; to know that the world opened out with its promise proffered, but not yet fulfilled ; with its tempting problems, ready for solution ; its horizons widening with the expansion of her mind ; the fruition of her physical perfection.

She knew she was beautiful ; she was none the

worse for that ; it gave her satisfaction, not pride ; the beauty she saw in her mirror afforded a kindling glow, similar to what she experienced when she looked out from the watch-tower over the river, now silvern, now golden ; beautiful, even when the sky overhead was grey and the waters ran dark in unison.

There were those beneath her roof whom she loved to have there ; by this time she felt herself the mistress of the Abbey ; she had wanted Lady Darcy to take the head of the table, but her guest had resisted the suggestion, and she had blushingly done the honours, with a shy and gentle grace, which was alluring beyond words, to one, at any rate, of those present.

Robert Darcy !

As she looked in her mirror she thought of him ; she felt his eyes upon her, looking over her shoulder, studying her reflection ; her face with its broad white brow, the column of her throat, the poise of her young figure.

She blushed. She wondered !

Nineteen ! Next year she would feel quite old, twenty !

How much might happen in a year : Lucille was thinking of pleasant things. What the future did contain was, to a great extent, hidden from her ; in these things God is good to us ; we have the present, we understand something of the past, but the future !—ah ! that is a negligible quantity, an

unknown factor, with its infinite, ever-changing possibilities.

The girl had seen but little of Robert during the three days which had elapsed since his arrival ; the affair of the highwayman had absorbed much of his time and attention, as it had that of Sir Evelyn Lee ; now the man had been consigned to the County jail, where he would await his trial until the next Assizes. Darcy had made little of that incident in the wood, in which he had played the premier part, laughing it off as an ordinary, every-day occurrence of the times, hardly worth considering, but Lucille knew that her father had gathered from other accounts a high estimate of the skill and courage Robert had shown in the moment of emergency. The whole circumstance fired her imagination ; the darkness of the wood, the pattering rain, the sudden attack and its intrepid meeting. Living her quiet life her appreciation went out to the brave man, ready, quick, skilful, strong ; she could condone a certain greyness, almost a grimness in Captain Darcy's face when in repose, or when some topic was under discussion which had to do with the well-being of the State, the Dutch war, for instance, or the extravagance and reckless manners of the Court ; she felt it was a part, the outward expression, of the character within which she admired ; she would not have had him merely gay, frivolous, and handsome, thinking more of a well-turned ankle, or the last fashion in shoe-

buckles, and cravats ; she preferred him staid, sober, even a little Puritan under his Cavalier dress. In his attitude towards his mother, his deference, his tender regard for her comfort, his anxiety about her health, she read the real nature of the man, with a woman's instinct, and understood rightly enough the elements of tenderness, of manly sympathy, which were hidden from the ordinary observer by the austere crust, partly natural, partly the product of his training in Monk's school, the school of the soldier *par excellence*.

After breakfast Lucille put on her sun-bonnet and sallied forth, with a basket under her arm, in the direction of the poultry-yard ; here was a broody hen, speckled grey, with a certain pride in her walk, a consciousness of coming motherhood. Lucille was taking down for her some straw to form a nest, and two china eggs to act as an inducement for the lady to adopt the intended quarters.

The poultry-yard adjoined the home farm, some three hundred yards across the park, well within the boundary walls ; the girl paid a visit to it most days, generally with something ready to attract her feathered dependents ; she knew them all individually, and loved them from the great game-cock, with his narrow close-cut crest, and yellow legs, to the bantam pair, with their small progeny, following behind, who carried themselves with all the airs of leviathan birds, an affectation of the seriousness of life, which Lucille found amusingly to her taste.

"May I go with you, Cousin?"

She started; she was thinking of him, and it was as if he had suddenly surprised her thoughts.

Robert had been standing under some trees, which formed an ornamental clump against the narrow pathway, leading from the Grange to the home farm. In his hand he held the dainty white volume which was destined as a birthday gift.

"I did not know you were there," she said; "you took me by surprise!"

"I hope you do not mind; I guessed you would be coming this way."

"What made you think that?"

"Some little opportunity I have had of observation. Twice I have seen you from my window about this hour, when I was getting ready to ride with Sir Evelyn."

"I did not know your eyes were upon me."

"The eyes count for little, the thoughts infinitely more. I can only see you rarely, Cousin, yet every day you are present with me in feeling, in imagination."

She walked on silently, not answering, not knowing how to answer. She felt a strange fluttering at her side to which she was wholly inexperienced; she would like to have put up her hand, to still the beating of her heart.

"I have brought you something to bear my birthday hopes, or some of them, at any rate." As he

spoke he held up before her eyes the little white-bound volume.

"Oh, how charming!" she cried. "How good of you! What is it?"

"Master Dryden's last volume of poems. I heard that all London was talking of it, and so I secured it against my journey."

With delight in her eyes she slung her basket over her arm and took the book from him.

"It is good of you," she said. "You could have given me nothing I should value more."

She opened it and read on the title page, "For Mistress Lucille Lee, from her friend and cousin, Robert Darcy."

"Nothing!" he quoted, and yet queried, "nothing?"

"I do not understand you." She flashed a look at him sideways, and noted a certain disturbance in his face, an unusual quiver in his lips, something of anxiety in his grey eyes, a little hesitation, a little doubt.

Again, and still more, she had that feeling in her side.

The sunlight flecked her face and dress as it came between the boughs of an elm, the leaves of which were fluttering in the light breeze. A squirrel darted up a tree-trunk, then sprang from bough to bough, in its aerial flight under the blue dome of the sky.

All nature seemed very joyous, very sympathetic

to this pair, walking alone through the park, on that glad September morning.

"I have given you much more than that—Lucille!" He said the name with a soft cadence in his voice, which few would recognize as belonging to the compass of his tones.

"I know I have your friendship," she parried.

"Friendship! 'Tis a beautiful word, yet there are others I like better, one especially!"

Silence. Only the sounds of nature, the lowing of cattle, the coughing of some deer in the park, the cackling of hens from the farmyard which lay now within sight, only these things could be heard—yes! there was one other—the vibrant beating of a girl's heart, over full, striving to be free, throbbing with life, in travail with hope, with the lush young growth of love.

Robert stretched out his hand and took Lucille's fingers into his. "The word is—love! Other than friendship, although containing it. Lucille, I love you! I have loved you ever since I first saw you, ever since you tended me, when I lay faint by the wayside, wounded."

She did not answer; it seemed to her as if all nature were listening, surprising his secrets and hers. The trees, the grass, the Abbey behind them, the farm in front; she longed to fly away, to seek some solitude in far-distant grove, to be alone.

He wondered she did not answer, grew afraid,

the doubt he had as to any return, reciprocation, increasing a hundredfold.

"Forgive me," he said, "I fear I have taken you by surprise; I have spoken too soon. I have known it so long myself, that I did not realize it must be new to you."

"Is it so new?" she asked.

He had dropped her hand, and looked away; now he turned to her again with quick movement. He saw the colour dyeing her peach-like cheeks, her shell-like ears, bathing her throat with warm tints, such as Venus might have taken to herself when Jove first looked upon her.

"You make me hope," he cried.

She answered what had gone before. "Is it new to me more than it is to you?—I trow not. I have tried to put it away from me, tried to banish it from my thoughts,"—she paused, and added beneath her breath—"and failed!"

He wound his arm about her. "Do you mean, can you mean, Lucille, that you love me as I love you?"

She bent her head. "Yes, with all my heart!"

"Thank God!" he cried. "It is your birthday gift to me, the most priceless gift in all the world." He kissed her cheek.

"We shall be seen," she protested.

"By the deer?" he asked gaily; "they will sympathize; they have their loves, too."

Lucille nodded. "I am ashamed," she said.

"Are you? Then I am proud enough for both."

"It is not a good thing to be proud."

"Forgive me, that is not correct when the pride is external, outside of us, when it is not self-pride."

"I do not see there is anything to be proud of! "

"There is a great deal," he answered; "it is here," and his arm against her side pressed her to him.

A tendril from her hair had slipped loose and lay upon her neck; it was brown, shot with gold, as if some fairy had interwoven threads of precious fibre into it. Looking down upon her from his greater height, Robert saw it.

"I am about to steal what you have not given me."

"What is that?" she asked, but without looking at him, shy of him, shy of herself.

"This lock of hair,"—he laid his hand upon it; then he drew his jewelled dagger from his belt, and with deft movement smote off the offending curl.

"How dare you do that!" she cried, yet unresisting till it was over.

"I only dared because I wanted it! I shall carry it until I die;" he raised it to his lips and then thrust it into his doublet, where it could rest unseen.

Afterwards they walked to the farm; Lucille found the hen and prepared its nest; Robert looking on.

"You are deceiving that poor bird," he said, touching the china eggs with his toe, as they lay in the corner Lucille had selected.

"Yes, for her good."

"Is deception, then, a virtue when it has a good object? Do not practise that upon me, pray, mistress."

"You begin early to lay down rules and regulations, sir," she said.

"Else I should never get them in."

"Will there be so many?"

"Countless, before I have you perfect."

She swept him a curtsey, with laughter in her eyes; "I shall have my rules, too," she remarked.

"You will find me the humblest of your servants."

"We shall see," she answered, with a doubtful shake of her head.

Who would have believed that this was the same Robert Darcy who had fought with Monk, the man, old beyond his years, staid, sombre, almost sad; the alchemy of excitement, of joy after doubt, realization of a great, strange happiness, this had worked in Robert Darcy and made him other than he had ever been before, or rather brought out an element in his character so hidden away that it was unsuspected by those who knew him best, perhaps even by himself.

They spent the morning strolling about the park, hardly talking at all, just content in the consciousness of each other's presence, in the new mysterious link

binding them together, a golden chain forged in the armoury of love.

When they returned to the Abbey they could hardly believe that so much of the day had slipped away, it seemed impossible the hour of the midday meal had so nearly come. When they rounded the corner of the last clump of trees in the park they were suddenly aware of the presence of Lady Darcy and Sir Evelyn Lee, standing sunning themselves on the top step before the great hall door.

"They have settled it, those young people," Sir Evelyn remarked; he had read the signs of the times instantly, having expected it.

"I hoped it would happen to-day," Lady Darcy answered. She turned to her old friend and kinsman, a smile on her face, but the suspicion of tears in her eyes: "We shall be able to rest content, Evelyn; my son will care for your girl, and she for him; and we——" she broke off, her lip quivered.

"I know," he answered.

"We shall be no longer needed"—she finished bravely. Turning round, she looked away in the direction where the river flowed on, golden in the sunlight.

"Their hearts are big enough," Sir Evelyn remarked quietly, "to hold us as well; we shall be none the less dear that they have one another."

She turned to him at once: "You do not believe I think otherwise?"

"Heaven forbid!"

The pair came up; Lucille hanging her head; Robert erect, glad, smiling upon the two so near to them, standing above on the step. As they reached the lowest point of the flight Robert took Lucille's hand, and so led her up until they were just in front of the parents. Then he knelt down, and Lucille feeling the pressure of his hand did likewise. "We want your blessing," Robert said; "Lucille has given me the greatest happiness in the world."

Together they laid their hands on the bowed heads of Robert and his affianced bride. It was such a benediction as the patriarchs of old gave to their descendants when the world was young.

"God bless you both," Sir Evelyn said, "always, ever, to your life's end, and beyond."

Lady Darcy said her "Amen," but with a voice so choked with tears, not by any means of sorrow, that the word came fluttering, like a tired bird to the branch on which it was to rest.

That afternoon Captain Darcy had arranged to ride out with Sir Evelyn Lee, the latter having some business to transact which required a witness.

Robert parted with Lucille with much reluctance, but then, as always, a promise with him was binding, much as he would prefer to spend the hours in her company. They were to meet at the chapel later on for the usual family prayers, which were said by the

Rev. Ambrose Fletcher, Sir Evelyn's chaplain, and old friend of the family.

During the Commonwealth Dr. Fletcher had taken refuge on the Picardy estates, where he had remained in seclusion, until the Restoration had given him an opportunity to return to England.

Lady Darcy always rested during the afternoon, rarely reappearing in the family circle until supper was served at six o'clock.

Lucille was left to her own devices ; a strange restlessness was upon her, quite foreign to her usual self ; she tried various occupations and found them all, even reading which she loved best, impossible. At length she determined to go to the top of the tower ; she wanted to have an uninterrupted recollection of all that had passed, since Robert Darcy first came into her life. The exertion of the climb suited the girl's mood ; with flushed face and panting breath she emerged on to the roof of the turret. The afternoon was beginning to be hazy, with a suggestion of something like coming frost, lending a crispness to the early autumn air.

She stood leaning over the parapet, looking out upon the landscape lying immediately beneath ; the stabling from which the messengers had come, and from which they had gone, on that never-to-be-forgotten day when Darcy had first been introduced to this very spot, and had ridden forth to join Colonel Dick Ingoldsby, with a view to capturing General

Lambert ; further away was the river, gleaming white, like a broad satin ribbon, as far as she could see ; in the middle distance was the island with the ford hard by where the troop of horse had crossed. Lucille pictured Darcy's presence by her side ; he had loved her then, child that she was ; Had he not assured her of the fact that very morning ? she was rich indeed to have won such a rare wealth, as the devotion of this great and good man.

The future ! Her face became grave ; a certain wonder, a measure of anxiety, in the depths of her beautiful eyes ; the river went on to the sea, its course was known ; but life was different ; who could tell which way it might tend, what it might bring forth ?

That morning the girl had been elated, lifted up, joyous : now she was alone, a feeling of depression, reaction from the morning's satisfaction came over her ; not that she doubted Robert or herself, not that she hoped less of what the future might have to bestow, but because she understood that in the web of life there were many transverse threads, that although some might be golden and some silver in their fibre, others would necessarily be of a darker hue and harsher texture.

For an hour she stood there, watching, waiting, thinking ; then it came to her that the time for the two riders to return must be well-nigh at hand ; she crossed to that side of the turret, from which a

view of the road they were sure to traverse could be obtained. The setting sun shot an oblique ray across her face ; she shaded her eyes with her hand.

After a few minutes she caught a glimpse of the two figures, like specks in the far horizon. She waved them a kiss ; she knew it was improbable they would see her, but the wind might carry what she sent ; she smiled at the conception, and her heart grew light again, as gradually the forms of the advancing horsemen became more distinct, and she could recognize her lover. She was able now to note the ease and mastery with which he managed his horse ; now and again, he would give attention to his companion, as if Sir Evelyn required it, or he was listening to something the latter said.

They entered the park ; suddenly Robert raised his hat and gave it a wave in the air, saluting her ; he knew she was watching for him. She stood for a few minutes longer, then shut the door behind her and ran down the steps.

A quarter of an hour later she knelt in the little chapel by Robert Darcy's side, in the open stalls which her father had placed in the tiny chancel ; Sir Evelyn was opposite to them, alone ; his fine face looked weary, he was hardly equal now-a-days to the ride they had taken that afternoon.

As they knelt, Lucille found her hand in Robert's, a second later a ring was slipped over her finger ; it took but a second ; immediately afterwards Darcy's

head was bent in prayer; he liked to feel that his vow to the girl, and hers to him, were registered in that ancient sanctuary of the family. But another thought obtruded itself on her mind; she hardly knew why, but it was disturbing, disquieting; in that very building she had received another ring; she was wearing it on her bosom; her thoughts were carried back to that night of fear when it seemed possible that her father, now kneeling in quiet devotion, peaceful, undisturbed, would be involved in one of those tragedies, with which England had become only too familiar, paying for his loyalty with his life.

The darkness had come into the small building, shrouding its corners, giving it an air of gloom and mystery; it seemed to Lucille as if Dr. Fletcher's voice sounded far away, almost unreal; she could hardly believe that the sanctuary had been restored to its original purpose; it might still have decay and devastation, ruin and neglect, written upon it.

She looked at Robert as if to satisfy herself that she was not the victim of some hallucination; his face reassured her, it was fine and strong, suffused with a certain uplifting; he, at any rate, had no doubt, and in his confidence her own quiet of spirit was re-established.

Lucille's heart was too full for words as she walked away from the chapel, her lover by her side. Sir Evelyn Lee remained to bring Dr. Fletcher back to

supper; the chaplain served a small district with its village church, some two miles from the Abbey, in addition to taking the service at any rate once daily in the private sanctuary of the Lees.

It was about half-past five, the sun on its way to the setting; here and there were dark avenues under the shade of the trees, then, again, came bright intervals where every frond of fern and bracken, every blade of grass, sparkled, as if diamonds had been strewn lavishly about their path; every drop of water distilled from the mist of evening was irradiated by the sun's final message to the earth, to which it was bidding good-bye.

Darcy wondered much at Lucille's silence, and the look on her face troubled him; she had entered the chapel bright and joyous at seeing him again, after some hours of separation. Now a cloud had evidently come into her sky and still left its effect on her countenance.

"You are cold, Lucille?" he suggested.

A slight tremor passed over her frame.

"The chapel has so many memories," she explained.

"Yes, but they are left behind, those associations of the past."

"Is anything ever quite left behind?" she inquired, looking up at him; "is not the present what the past has made it?"

"The present is the anteroom of the future, and

in the future we shall go, thank God, hand-in-hand to meet whatever betides with courage, helping each other. This is the emblem of an indissoluble bond ;” as he spoke he took her left hand and held it up ; the ring, which was set with diamonds, scintillating as he did so.

“ Yes, I like to think that ; it is very beautiful,” she added. “ I can hardly realize even yet ”—she stopped. Then she looked round, there was no one in sight, her father and Dr. Fletcher had probably gone another way ; she buried her head in Robert’s shoulder ; he kissed her hair—“ that I am really yours ! ”

CHAPTER IV

A PROPHECY

THE month that followed was certainly one of the happiest ever passed by two people ; Robert Darcy and Lucille were left much to each other's society ; and neither of them asked for anything better. They rode together, walked in the park, sometimes took the boat out from the shed, and went for a pull on the Avon.

Lucille told Robert all the story of that eventful time, when Charles, a fugitive, in danger of his life, threw himself on the mercy of the Lees. They crossed the river to the spot where the horses had awaited the Prince and his companion ;—Sir Evelyn had pointed it out to Lady Lee and his daughter soon after the occurrence.

Darcy, who had played his small part in the after events, which had been the complement of that earlier story, was deeply interested. The girl had told him everything else, except about wearing the ring ; perhaps, she was shyly conscious of its soft resting-place ; he had, of course, often noticed the

tiny gold chain which she wore on all occasions, and which was disclosed by the low-necked frock of those days ; he had never referred to it in so many words, until this morning when they stood on the further side of the river, under the shadow of the trees, which had hidden the horses on the night of flight.

Lucille, thinking of Charles, had put her hand to the chain.

"Why do you always wear that, Lucille?"

"It was my mother's," she answered evasively.

"Is there nothing attached to it—a locket?"

She hesitated for a moment, how she should answer ; then she drew up the ring, and held it for Robert to see.

He noted the fleur-de-lis.

"Where did that come from?" he asked.

"The King!" she responded.

"On what occasion?"—but while he asked, he knew, for there could be but one.

Lucille had not even been presented at Court since the Restoration, Sir Evelyn not liking the free manners obtaining at Whitehall and Windsor.

"He put it into my hand in the chapel, just before my father hid him away. I was thinking of it the other night, because you gave me the ring I wear in the same place;" as she spoke she looked down at her left hand.

"It certainly is a strange coincidence," he agreed,

"as I did it without having the least idea what had gone before."

"Yea, I thought that."

She slipped the ring back again out of sight.

"I am not sure I like the idea of your wearing another man's ring near your heart, Lucille."

"Even though it is a king's?" she suggested.

"Perhaps, most of all, because it is a king's; there is a glamour about royalty, not accorded to lesser folk."

"Does not Master Shakespeare say in *Henry IV.*, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown'?"

"Yes; no doubt kings have their disabilities," he agreed, "but men, and women, too, suffer for them, do for them, give to them things denied to others."

Lucille's mind went back to that young man, who had come to her so unexpectedly from amidst the trees in the park; she remembered her first impression, that he was plain, swarthy, almost ugly, and how there had grown out of it a sense of attraction, a feeling of domination; her child's heart and will giving themselves up a glad surrender to the majesty which lay behind the deep-set eyes, brown and winsome; if she had felt that then, in her inexperience, knowing nothing, what would be the effect when all the majesty of kingship was superadded, the man swelling to the stature of the King?

They walked back again towards the boat.

"Have you worn that ring ever since?"

"Yes; my mother put it on when she gave me the chain; the Prince told me," she added, "that one day I might find its need, and so finding, claim from him what I wanted."

"I trust that eventuality may never happen," Darcy said gravely.

"I trust so, too," she responded.

But, perhaps, although they agreed, they were thinking of quite other things; the man and the girl.

As the time of departure approached, when the visit of Lady Darcy and her son must draw to a close, Robert began to urge Lucille to name a day when the marriage might be consummated; she shrank back shyly, asking for time, there was no hurry; "we can fix a day in the spring," she suggested.

"You forget how old I am," he answered, "how long I have waited already."

"What for?" she asked.

"For you to grow up."

"Was I so very long?" she pouted.

He kissed her lips; they were alone in the library. "It seemed long to me," he answered. "I made up my mind not to speak till you were nineteen, and even then I was afraid."

"Afraid?" she echoed.

"Yes, that I might be premature, even if you did like me a little."

"And yet you want to hurry me now."

"Ah! that is quite different; you have given me your word; you belong to me, and I have a right to urge you."

She put her finger up and stepped back. "A tyrant!" she cried; "the lover takes off the mask and shows the stern face behind!"

"It will never be stern to you, sweetheart," he responded.

"Not unless I deserve it!"

"How could you deserve it?"

"By crossing your will, of course."

"My will is your will."

"That would be very dull, always, sir!"

"I like to be dull."

"And stupid?"

"You could never be that, Lucille."

She shook her head playfully. "You do not know me yet, sir, altogether."

"If so, it is not for the want of study," he responded; then he took her into his arms.

Lucille was surprised to find in subsequent conversations that Sir Evelyn and Lady Darcy agreed with Robert in wishing an early date fixed for the marriage; their reasons were not the same as those of the prospective bridegroom, but the result was a combined pressure, to which the girl yielded, with perhaps a greater show of reluctance than she really felt.

Sir Evelyn and Lady Darcy, well aware of the

frail conditions attaching to their health, were anxious that a marriage, which they believed ensured happiness and mutual devotion to the two beings they loved best, should take place before either of them was called away. Both Sir Evelyn and Lady Darcy had accustomed themselves mentally to face this contingency in the not distant future with calm courage, born of an assured faith.

It was settled in the end, that the wedding should be celebrated on an early day after Easter in the following year. These details were only arranged, to the satisfaction of all parties, during the last week before Robert and his mother were to end their visit at the Abbey.

On the last day when the shadow of coming departure had taken much of the brightness out of the landscape as regards these two hearts, Robert and Lucille rode out together.

It was a beautiful day in early October ; as they passed, the fields presented an appearance of unusual activity, the harvest was being gathered in.

Without specially choosing it, they took the same road by which Robert came as General Monk's messenger to Sir Evelyn Lee. By a sort of mutual instinct they turned their horses into the cross track, where the encounter with Buckingham had taken place. To the left was the tree to which Ebenezer Holden had been bound ; close by the scene of the duel, when Robert had received that slight wound which

had led up to Lucille's ministrations to his faintness.

"It all seems like a dream," he said, "and ever so far away, as if it had taken place in some other existence, not really mine; I wonder why that is so."

"I suppose it is because so much has happened since." She turned to him with a look of love, two tears standing in her eyes, then trickling down her cheeks; she brushed them away hastily with her gloved hand. "We have so much to be thankful for," she said.

"Yes, a thousand things;" but, although he agreed, his tone was sombre, even sad.

The ferns and bracken in the hedgerows were turning yellow, and the outlying branches of trees were showing the touches of a golden autumn, writing its mark of approaching decay; lovely, but ominous of coming winter. They could hear the sound of men calling to one another in a field not far away, which they were reaping.

Again by a mutual impulse they rode in the direction from which the sounds proceeded.

Coming to the gate, Robert bent over and unfastened the catch with the aid of his riding crop; he swung the gate open; Lucille rode through, he following on Moonlight. Until they had entered the enclosure, within the tall quick-set hedge, Robert had not noticed that this was the very field in which

Lambert's tents had been pitched and himself captured by Colonel Dick Ingoldsby.

As soon as they had mounted the gentle slope which led from the gateway to the general level of the field, Darcy recognized the spot ; in the distance he could see the farm-buildings ; the very place where the tents had been pitched, was now being reaped ; occasionally a rabbit would scuffle from the proximity of the reapers, and run with swiftly moving tail in the direction of the hedge ; two or three dogs were about kept busy in pursuit, pouncing upon the flying quarry with a sharp bark of anticipation. Some escaped, but the majority paid the penalty.

Lucille flushed, and turned away from the sight ; her sympathy was with the rabbits ; Robert Darcy, on the contrary, was interested, and amused at the sport.

Suddenly his eyes were diverted in the direction of a thick-set man, standing on one side, only a few paces away from them, watching the proceedings, while his hands rested on a stout gnarled staff, cut at some previous period, out of the hedge.

It was Ebenezer Holden himself. Darcy noted that he had grown grey and old in the interval since he had seen him last, on the day of the King's landing at Dover ; in addition, there was a look of disappointment about the man, of dejection, as if life no longer held for him any attraction, or hope. Darcy pitied him from the bottom of his heart ; the

contrast of his own future with that of the Puritan farmer striking him forcibly. The latter had filled a conspicuous, if not a great place in the ranks of his party, when that party was the dominant force in the state; he had seen the fabric which had appeared previously strong and stable, crumble to ruin, not one stone left upon another; hopes dashed to the ground, his party abused, scouted, its leaders banished or dead. Holden, himself, was like some stout oak of the forest which upreared its head towards the sky, long after the sap had ceased to rise within its limbs, when the beauty of its strength and prime had gone, and it remained only an unsightly relic of past vigour. Darcy, on the contrary, had before him a future to which he looked with hope, longing, and confidence; he had won the love of this beautiful girl, sitting gracefully on her horse a few yards away from him, their happiness appeared assured; they trusted and loved each other.

While he thought this, Ebenezer Holden, who had marked their arrival without actually turning to look at them, now came in their direction; he walked heavily with a certain lameness, as if suffering from some rheumatic malady. Robert regretted now that they had given way to the impulse, which had made them ride into the field; Holden struck him, although he felt ashamed even to own it to himself, as a bird of ill-omen, some lonely raven croaking over a landscape, and casting a shadow upon it.

It was impossible now to turn away without speaking. Darcy, in fact, moved his horse in the Puritan's direction, lifting Moonlight's head, which had been nosing among the stalks of stubble round her feet.

"I bid you good-day, Master Holden," he said.

As he spoke, Lucille, who was in a reverie, her head turned away, started, and swept her horse round towards her lover; she flushed; she, too, felt a reluctance in greeting her father's tenant.

Holden's appearance was gloomy, his brow lowering. He did not remove his hat, or exhibit any sign of outward courtesy or greeting.

"You have come to see the place of your triumph," he suggested, "when you guided Colonel Ingoldsby to this spot."

"Not intentionally," Darcy answered, "the fact was certainly not in my mind; I only recognized the field after I had opened the gate, and we had ridden into it."

Holden grunted, but whether as an indication that he accepted or disbelieved the statement was not clear.

"I hope you are satisfied with your handiwork, young man?"

"To what do you refer?"

"The part you took in placing that man of Belial on the throne; a disgrace to the country he governs, to the manhood to which he belongs, a rake, a profligate, a debauchee, whom God will judge."

Darcy's grip on Moonlight's bridle tightened, so that the horse grew restless, backed and curveted; he was glad of the occupation of reducing the animal to quiet and obedience; the Puritan's words stirred him to anger, all the more because he knew them to be true; his loyalty to his sovereign clashed with his disappointment and dislike of the man, Charles Stuart; at the same time, he was afraid lest Holden, who was not too nice of speech, might say things unfit for a young girl's hearing.

At length he answered: "It is not for you, or me, Master Holden, to judge His Majesty; we have our duty to do in the world, and must leave him to a Higher Judgment."

Holden laughed, the sound was not pleasant to hear, like the rasping of a rusty saw on tough wood:

"Those who placed Charles Stuart on the throne are partners of his guilt, and will suffer with him."

He fixed Darcy with his eye; there was something of frenzy in his look as of a mind distraught, not master of itself, yet having a certain mastery over those brought under the influence of that glance.

"A soldier, as you well know, Master Holden, obeys commands, his responsibility is limited to fulfilling them to the utmost of his ability."

Holden raised his gnarled stick; for a moment Lucille thought that he was about to strike Robert, and she put her horse forward as if she would avert

the blow. This action turned the Puritan's attention upon herself.

"You will suffer, too, Mistress Lee," he asserted, "you who are linking your fate with this man." He passed his hand across his brow with an expressive gesture as if trying to remove some cloud from his vision: "I see dark days before you both; I see the valley of sorrow and fear into which you enter; I cannot tell, perchance it may be the 'valley of the shadow of death,' of which the Psalmist speaks."

Darcy glanced at Lucille, and saw her face blanch; Ebenezer Holden had a sinister reputation as a seer of visions; the common folk credited him with second sight, and those above him in station were not altogether free from the same superstition. Lucille remembered what he had said of Buckingham; now it was her turn, and that of Robert Darcy to receive Holden's prognostication of the future.

"Our lives and future are in God's hands," Darcy said sternly; "it is not for us to pry into that future, neither do I believe we have the power to do so."

"I see what I do see, and I know what I do know; God has denied me the joy of my desires; He has cut me off from all that life held dear; He has left me a lonely, blasted stock, in a weary land."

There was something pathetic in the old man's half-sorrowful, half-fierce summing up of his own fate, which moved both his hearers.

He went on: "Nevertheless, He has given me, whether I want it or not, certain powers of vision." He turned to Darcy: "You will remember what I say when the gate clangs behind you and the four walls gird you about, cold, and clammy, so that you cannot get free."

Without saying another word Holden turned away, and, leaning on his cudgel, limped heavily across the field towards his men, who had well-nigh finished their reaping.

"I am sorry we came," Lucille said.

"So am I, for your sake," Robert answered; "as regards myself, I do not believe in Holden's powers; he is just a crazy old man, disappointed of his ambition, shut in within himself and only finding vent in anathemas on other people. Come! let us return."

Darcy took the bridle of Lucille's horse into his right hand and guided it down the slope into the road; then he closed the gate behind them. As he did so, he could see the stern figure of the Puritan against the sky-line; he was watching them depart, with the same hard look about his eyes and mouth, his face shadowed by the broad brim of his hat.

CHAPTER V

WEDDING AND PASSING

CAPTAIN ROBERT DARCY and Mistress Lucille sat side by side in church.

They had been made man and wife the previous day, in the little private chapel in the park, by special licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Lucille, herself, would have preferred the parish church, at which Dr. Ambrose Fletcher officiated, and where they went for service the following day, being Sunday; but Sir Evelyn Lee had grown strangely feeble of late; it was his decided preference which carried the day and settled the *locale* of the wedding. Sir Evelyn loved the chapel from its long association with his ancestors, and also with a spirit of thankfulness that he had been privileged to restore it to its pristine duty and use. Lucille loved it, too, but somehow felt associations attaching to it, the suggestion of dark days past which might presage dark days yet to come, and these thoughts she wished to banish from her mind on that day of all days in the year. She did not want to picture the secret

chamber behind the north arch, the coming and going of men with stealthy tread, a price upon their heads; she did not even wish to recall the one occasion, on which she herself had played some small part in one of these transactions; but her father's will had been law to her all her life, and she was the more ready now to yield to it since he had become feeble of body, with a weakness which indicated a separation that could not be for long delayed; with it sometimes came also a certain querulousness, quite foreign to Sir Evelyn's usual characteristic, eloquent of the decay of nerve, part of his failing health.

Robert Darcy had been quite ready to abide by any decision which Lucille and her father arrived at. In the chapel he had put on the ring of betrothal; in the same place he was glad and content to add that more binding circlet which followed.

So it came about that on the morning of an April day, a Saturday after Easter, the ceremony was performed. The weather was true to its proverbial reputation, now bright sunshine, now the sprinkling of soft showers upon trees and earth; around them was the burgeoning of spring, the bursting of buds, the unfolding of leaves, tender greens and browns of tiny beech and chestnut leaves, ferns uncurling themselves in the hedgerows, and under the fir-trees, rooks cawing above the elm-tops, busy with the annual nesting.

One great disappointment had preceded the

wedding, and cast some shadow over it, Lady Darcy had found herself too unwell to travel, so that Robert had ridden forth alone ; Colonel Dick Ingoldsby had come to be groomsman ; Lucille was attended by two distant cousins, daughters of Lord Garstone. General Monk, now Duke of Albemarle, had sent a very handsome sapphire brooch as a gift to the daughter of his old friend, and the bride of his late aide-de-camp ; he, himself, was on the seas with the Duke of York fighting the Dutch, sinister rumours of engagements and defeats filling the air.

Lucille had been dressed in white satin with fur-lined cape cloak over her shoulders ; she had looked passing fair by the side of Robert Darcy, who was attired in blue velvet, slashed with silver, a very proper gentleman, but the bridesmaids, who were lively young girls in their teens, averred that he was somewhat stern and severe looking for a husband, not the one they would have chosen by any means.

On the morrow the party had gone two miles to the village church ; Sir Evelyn, alone, remaining behind, not well enough to essay the expedition, but promising himself to be present at an afternoon service, to be held in the chapel.

Dr. Ambrose Fletcher held forth at some length on recondite points, to which Captain Darcy paid but small heed, although Lucille had her eyes fixed on the black-robed figure with the white cravat and bands throughout the discourse, with an appearance

of absorbed interest. Robert, it is to be feared, spent his time in looking at the woman he had won for his wife, and meditating on the strangeness of it all; how he had been brought to Grangeland Abbey, how he had found his love, and she, more wonderful still, had discovered its complement in her heart. There was a look on her face different from any he had ever seen before; she seemed to have grown suddenly older, more mature, more grave, as if the responsibility of life had made itself felt, and written its mark upon her countenance, finding expression in the grave depths of her eyes, in the curves of her small mouth and chin; she had left behind her the girlhood, which had been hers, when first Darcy saw her bending over him by the wayside; she had taken on instead the dignity of womanhood, and it sat well upon her, and added adornment to the marvel of her softness and beauty.

Although Robert did not listen to any great extent to the good clergyman's polished periods, his heart was filled with thankfulness which was in itself worship, sitting there by her side, on a red cushion, in the great square pew, set apart for the family at the Abbey.

When the Blessing was pronounced, and they left the ivy-covered church, many salutations were accorded them, bows and curtseyings from the village folk, raising of hats from those in higher rank. Lucille received it all with a flushed face, and graceful

appreciation, while Captain Darcy walked by her side, hat in hand ; Colonel Ingoldsby and the two girls had gone on in front.

"Did you find the sermon long, Lucille?" Robert inquired.

"A little," she admitted, "towards the close."

"I did not," Darcy said, with some pride.

"I do not believe you were listening at all."

"I own, I was not ; I was better employed."

"In what way?"—yet she knew.

"I was looking at you, sweetheart."

"You do not go to church to look at me?"

"One goes to church to express thankfulness for all God's mercies, and you are the greatest I ever have had, or shall have."

For answer she took his arm, holding the train of her dress with the other hand ; she pressed him to her side. They had left the main road and had struck into the park ; blue sky overhead, a scudding white cloud was being driven by a modest breeze towards the horizon.

"It's a real Sun-day," he said, after a pause, "we shall never forget it, either of us."

"No," she agreed, "one of those memories we store up against the future."

"You are not afraid of that last word, dearest?" he asked her.

Lucille's eyes shone as she turned towards him. "Not with you ; how could I be afraid? We shall

walk side by side, hand in hand, always ; of that I feel assured."

"You make me very happy," he answered, and pressed the hand upon his arm.

"Do you know," she said, "I was a little afraid when the news came of a battle at sea, in which the Duke of Albemarle was one of the commanders, that you might want to go ; especially when they were worsted."

"Perhaps I should have done, under other circumstances," he responded, "although I should ever prefer to fight by land than on the water ; my old master loves fighting for its own sake, and cares little on which element the battle is waged."

"I should not like you to go," Lucille cried ; "I want you to promise me you will never fight again in any quarrel, public or private."

Was there a cloud on the sky, or had they come where the trees obscured the sunshine ? The landscape seemed suddenly to lose its brightness and become darker ; why did the vision of His Grace of Buckingham come to Darcy's mind's-eye at this particular moment ?

"I will never seek a quarrel," Robert said, after a pause, "nay, for your sake, sweetheart, I will ever avoid them ; more I cannot promise, because more might involve my honour."

"Ah ! I pray, Robert, that you may be kept safely

for me ; for, indeed, my whole life is bound up in your welfare."

They struck across the park towards the Abbey. One wing had been set apart for their exclusive use ; it was intended they should remain at least a month before they left for Kingston.

Lucille had been concerned about her father's loneliness, when she would be no longer under his roof. A widowed cousin, a Mrs. Frankland Somerville, had arranged to stay with Sir Evelyn for some months, until Captain and Mrs. Darcy returned.

When they reached the house the rest of the party had not arrived from church, having taken a longer route ; it still wanted some half-hour before the first bell would sound for dinner.

"Where is Sir Evelyn ?" Lucille asked the butler.

"I have not seen him, madam, for the last hour or so."

"I expect he is asleep in the library," Lucille commented to her husband. She had fully expected her father's greeting on their return, all the more that he had been unable to be with them.

With a light step she crossed the hall and tapped gently at the library door.

There was no response. Nodding to Robert, as if her original opinion was confirmed, she gently turned the handle and entered the room.

A fire was burning in the hearth, but had nearly

spent itself; it had not been replenished for some time, although an abundance of logs was placed in a basket close to the hearth.

Sir Evelyn was half sitting, half reclining in his favourite chair; a cat, which attached itself specially to him, was sitting curled up on his knee.

"We are back again, father," Lucille said in gentle tones, intending to rouse him.

It was an unusual thing for him to sleep in the morning; he frequently did so in the afternoon and evening.

Sir Evelyn did not stir, and there was no response.

Lucille became alarmed; the silence struck her as ominous; a nervous feeling came into her heart. She turned to see if her husband had come into the room after her, but he had apparently remained in the hall. She advanced to her father and saw that his head had fallen on one side in an unusual attitude; she laid her hand upon his arm, but he remained quite still.

Her worst fears, which had sprung into being during those few seconds, were realized.

Sir Evelyn Lee had passed to his rest.

Lucille knelt down and buried her face on her father's knees; she was stunned, overwhelmed; it seemed as if all the moorings of her life had suddenly been removed, and she herself was drifting in an unknown sea. Her father had been so much to her ever since she could remember; now he was gone.

As she knelt there Robert entered, noted her attitude and came forward; he, too, even more quickly, realized what had taken place. Bending down he put his arms round Lucille, and laid her head against his shoulder. She felt his strong arms about her, and even in her grief and abandonment thanked God, who had given her a husband worthy of her trust, to be by her side in her hour of sorrow and trial.

CHAPTER VI

SUSPENSE

OCTOBER 1669.

Five years and a half have passed since the quiet wedding in the private chapel at Grangeland, and that subsequent discovery in the library of the Abbey, which had cast the first great shadow over the union of Robert and Lucille Darcy. Many things had happened during these eventful years, eventful as regards the State, and also with respect to the home life of those with whom we have to do, which cannot be set down in detail.

Lady Darcy had passed to her rest in the autumn of the year in which the wedding took place, lovingly tended by her son, and the daughter-in-law who had been to her even more than she had anticipated, during the months they had lived under the same roof. Lucille had learnt in the experience of her sorrow for her father's death, and in the continual tending of Robert's mother, with its final issue, those lessons which Providence intends should be learnt in the crucible of life, softening, refining, purifying.

Children had been born to them, three boys: the eldest, Harold, was now more than four years old, the youngest, Francis, just a year; between these two one had been born on the estate in Picardy, during the time of the Great Plague, when they were banished from England by the wise discretion of the master of the house. Lucille had suffered somewhat in the crossing and subsequent journey, the new arrival had scarcely breathed ere he was taken. She had felt the loss bitterly, and had been eager from that time to return to England, away from the memories of suffering and sorrow, which henceforth associated themselves with their French château.

England, especially London, had passed during these years through the most startling vicissitudes the nation and city ever endured. The Thames had seen Dutch war vessels riding triumphant on the broad bosom of the river, carrying destruction and devastation right to the water-gates of the city; the nation had been stirred to its very centre, and had once more pinned its faith to the great man who had been the cynosure of his country's eyes, at her period of dire need a few years earlier. George Monk, Duke of Albemarle, had risen to the occasion, and, in spite of failing health, had made himself the foremost champion of England against its formidable foes; first organizing the defences of the Thames, and then turning the tide of war against those great

maritime rivals, who disputed with her the naval supremacy of the world.

Needless to say, Robert Darcy had not looked on unmoved at these great crises, but he had adhered to the resolution he had made, and the promise he had given Lucille in the park at Grangeland Abbey; his purse, and that of his wife, had been freely opened to help in the preparations and armaments necessary for the welfare of the State, but his sword had been idle in its scabbard, save for those exercises which he still took, with Longstaffe as his pseudo-antagonist, in a room he had fitted up as an armoury.

From Kingston they had seen the flames and dense smoke of that huge fire, which, beginning in Pudding Lane, at the King's bakery, ended in Pye Corner, after reducing half the metropolis to ashes, and frightening the whole of it with a panic, lest not a stone of the great city should be left one upon the other.

Captain Darcy and his wife offered open house to the fugitives, and for a time every outbuilding was filled with valuables, plate, specie, and furniture, brought down from London and stored there in safety under guard. Harold, like his mother, precocious in childhood, used to watch the blazing city with distended eyes and blanched face, asking strange questions, which neither father nor mother was able to answer, implanting on his childish memory dreams

and visions, which remained an impression to his dying day, in good old age.

The city, when once the fire was extinguished and the danger passed, had set itself to repair the disaster with British courage and tenacity. After a while life resumed its usual colour and routine. Barges, filled with gentlemen in the height of fashion, and ladies gaily dressed to match them, once more came down the river from the steps at Westminster or the Tower Wharf; the tinkle of laughter, the strains of lute and guitar, songs, not always too refined, composed by Lord Rochester, or Master Wycherley, floated up to the windows of that house at Kingston. Lucille, when she heard words which might be repeated by her boy, unwitting that they were not fitted for clean tongues, used to close the windows to shut them out. Sometimes Robert talked to her of presentation at Court, and that she should take her place in Society, befitting her rank as her father's daughter, and her husband's wife. Lucille ever resisted the idea, which was, indeed, made half-heartedly, for the Court of Charles was a place in which honest women and clean-souled men found little affinity, and less appreciation.

My Lady Castlemaine, and her like, set the fashion at Whitehall, while His Grace of Buckingham, and the other members of the cabal, ruled the kingdom, sapping its resources for their benefit, fearing neither God nor man, exciting the disgust and ridicule of all

true patriots, as well as of the statesmen of the world.

When the month of October of that year of grace 1669 came to Robert and Lucille, it seemed to promise them that future of quiet peace and prosperity which they desired more than anything in the world; the enjoyment of their home-life and the upbringing of their children; no presage or shadow of coming trouble showed itself on the horizon of their existence.

At this time Captain Darcy was proposing to add certain lands to his Kingston property, so as to make it more complete; to arrange this he had to go almost daily to his lawyer, Master Gaythorpe, in St. Martin's Fields, for the discussion of title and other deeds pertaining to the new purchase. Lucille was not left alone, as Dr. Ambrose Fletcher had of late given up his cure at Grangeland and become a member of their circle, having his own suite of rooms, and joining the family meals when so inclined.

One day in the middle of October Darcy had ridden into the city, starting, as he usually did, at an early hour. After the sun had set the streets of London were dangerous places for all respectable citizens; lights were few and far between, except for the torches of the link-men and the lanterns of the watch. Bullies ruled the road after dusk; they were drawn from the highest in the land as well

as from the lowest; great nobles did not disdain to ruffle it in the dark. No woman's honour or man's life was safe, who had business abroad after the sun had set.

Mistress Lucille had parted from her husband in the morning with her habitual bright and loving farewell kiss; he was riding Sultan, the horse which had taken Moonlight's place, as the latter, his favourite mount, was relegated to a peaceful old age in the meadows at Grangeland, or in the stables when winter set its icy touch on the land. Robert had bent down from his saddle to wish his wife good-bye; some of the severe lines of his face had disappeared, mellowed by the quiet home love which meant more to him every year; on the other hand Lucille had filled out, taking on softer contours in the fulness of her bright, beautiful womanhood. The sun was shining on the small courtyard, at the back of the house, as Darcy turned his horse in the direction of the high-road; a great mastiff lay at full length by the side of its kennel, with red tongue extended, lazily eyeing the retreating forms of horse and rider.

"You will be home early, sweetheart?" Lucille called, as the gate was swung back by Longstaffe to admit of egress.

Robert raised his plumed hat. "Yes, without fail, if God wills."

It was a perfunctory question, and the first part

of the answer formal enough, but somehow Lucille fancied, as she stooped to pat the great dog, that the last part of the sentence had an expression conveyed in it, which gave her a momentary sense of anxiety and depression.

It passed in a few minutes as she went about the ordering of her house—to recur later.

In the afternoon Lucille began to look out for her husband's return, generally heralded by the deep baying of the great dog, or the sharper barking of two Clumber spaniels which were kept, when not free to roam about, in a loose box at the end of the stabling; after that she would hear the creaking of the heavy bolt on the outside gate, then the hoofs of the horse striking on the cobble-stones of the yard.

She was sitting at work with an embroidery frame before her, in her boudoir, at the back of the house, overlooking the yard; with her was Harold, who was trying to spell out small words in a horn book, which his father had brought for him a few days previously.

"Is daddy coming?" the child asked from time to time; his mother answering with the recurring iteration, "I do not hear him yet," after she had stopped her needle to listen with intent ear.

The afternoon wore on. Dr. Fletcher came into the room: he was a white-haired, cheery old man, looking venerable in his long black coat; he had a shovel hat in his hand.

"Has not Captain Darcy returned?" he asked Lucille.

"No, something must have kept him; he is later than usual."

"The night will soon be dark, clouds are in the sky."

"Yes," she answered, getting up and scanning the horizon; "are you going out?"

"Yes, to see Mistress Green, she was worse this morning; I promised to read to her again later in the day."

Green was the second gardener; his wife was ill, consumption. Dr. Fletcher, although free from the responsibility of a cure, did many kindly acts in the neighbourhood, especially among those connected with the house.

Lucille was sorry when she heard the hall door shut behind the Doctor, she would have preferred his remaining in the house; why, she could hardly have told.

A nurse came to fetch Harold for his supper; Lucille was left alone. She became restless; her boudoir seemed strangely small, restricted; she could no longer see to work at her frame. Leaving the room, she went out into the corridor, which ran the whole length of the upper part of the house. A manservant was lighting the lamps along the passages, the light of day just departing was contending with the growing brilliance of the artificial illumination,

the result being strange shadows, which were cast in various directions, as Mistress Darcy paced the length of the floor. At intervals were pictures of the Ashbrookes, the late Lady Darcy's family portraits; Lucille felt as if they were looking at her, some frowning, some leering; it got upon her nerves.

She went down-stairs and flitted irresolutely from room to room; saw that the table was fully appointed for the meal she and Robert would have together as soon as he came back; the happiness in her home, the rest and peace of it, was all complete but for one item; the master was not there, the husband absent.

"I wish he would come," she kept saying to herself, "I cannot think what is keeping him."

Another hour passed which seemed like three; she went up-stairs again and put on a long, fur-lined cloak, which had a hood to it she could throw over her head. Thus equipped, she went out into the yard, spoke to the great dog, who rose to greet her.

By this time it was quite dark, the night promised to be stormy; she opened the door of the stables and looked in, there were half-a-dozen stalls in all, four occupied by the strong coach-horses which were used when they drove together, or passed from Kingston to Grangeland; then came her own beautiful mare, Helen, which Robert had given her almost immedi-

ately after they were married. A large lantern threw its sickly light over the interior of the stabling ; the horse knew her step, turned as far as her head-rope would allow, and whinnied. Lucille went up and spoke to the beautiful creature, stroking her face and patting her neck, but all the time with half attention, listening ! listening !—for sounds which did not come.

The last stall was ominously empty.

A groom had heard her go in ; he came to ask if she wanted anything.

“No, nothing, Samuel, thank you,” she said.

“Captain Darcy is late, ma’am.”

Lucille could not frame a reply, her lips were quivering ; a great fear was upon her, apprehension of she knew not what.

Samuel was surprised when his mistress left the building without speaking to him ; she was ever courteous to her servants.

She next went to the great gate ; the lodge-keeper left his porch, he had been standing smoking a long pipe, waiting to open it directly he heard the sound of his master’s coming. Over the gateway was a big lamp ; Lucille beckoned to the man to open for her. He touched his hair in salutation, obeying the silent mandate. He, too, wondered she did not speak.

She stood leaning against one of the outside

wooden supports; silence reigned except for the distant barking of some dog, probably in a barge, on the river.

Half-an-hour went by. Lucille, in spite of her warm wrap, felt chilled. She walked up and down, occasionally stamping her feet to restore their circulation.

At last! A sound came, brought by the wind to her ears. Horse-hoofs were coming her way, along the high-road, not rapidly, but as a careful man would ride when the way was dark.

The mastiff bayed; he, too, had heard the sound.

Lucille felt tempted to go forward and greet the on-comer, but there was a danger he might strike against her in the darkness; then, again, it might not be her husband, for the road was a public one, and led to a landing-stage on the Thames, a couple of hundred yards lower down.

The rider came into sight; Lucille uttered a cry of joy; she recognized the white stockings of the horse first.

Her husband rode up; he seemed to be weary, not sitting bolt-upright as he usually did, but bending over.

Then she saw he had something in his arms. He came close to her side, but made no exclamation of surprise, or satisfaction at seeing her there.

Uncovering what he held, without a word, he showed Lucille his burden.

A strange feeling came over her, something different from anything she had ever experienced before; in her husband's arms lay a young girl, apparently either asleep, or insensible.

CHAPTER VII

ARREST

LUCILLE stood transfixed with astonishment, and mingling with it a sense of repulsion, a pang of something like jealousy, beyond her power to understand or define.

"Whom have you there, Robert?" she asked. The tone of her voice surprised herself; it was sharp, almost shrill; the long suspense and fear of the afternoon, the new sensation when she saw the burden her husband held against his breast; these things had gone to affect the timbre of her voice, and make it other than usual.

For answer Robert bent down and laid the girl in his wife's arms, which she held out in obedience to the mandate in his eyes, but, again, with a feeling of repulsion. At the same time she noted how white her husband looked, and that he moved stiffly, as if in pain. Sultan, too, hung his head, almost touching the cobbles with his muzzle, as if tired with the double burden.

A great curiosity swept Lucille to scan the face of

the girl, who had roused sufficiently to stand with assistance, but evidently not knowing what she did. With a touch she moved back the cloak, which partly shrouded the face. The form was that of a girl in her teens, not exactly pretty, but with an appealing attractiveness, which comes with youth and modesty, and no doubt would be enhanced under other circumstances by a certain vivacity, lacking now. Her dress was that of the middle-class, plain, but not inexpensive, no idea of poverty or need conveyed by it.

Lucille drew herself up with a sigh of relief for which she was ashamed. Robert, she knew, had never looked upon another woman besides herself with love, or even admiration, and certainly this chit of a girl need not for an instant shake the confidence, begotten of years of understanding companionship. The burden was still borne by her arms about the girl's shoulders, but had passed from her heart; instead had come much compunction, that she had ever harboured a feeling unworthy of herself and Robert. Perhaps, too, the recollection of her own mirror, and the tale it told, were not altogether absent from Lucille's memory during these moments.

Robert dismounted slowly and threw the reins of Sultan to one of the stablemen who had come up.

"Rub him down carefully," he directed, "and give him a warm mash."

"Yes sir."

Darcy then took Lucille's arm into his hand, holding it partly with affection, partly as if to steady himself. They turned together towards the door, Lucille helping the girl, as if she were a tired child.

They paced side by side in silence, she awaiting an explanation, he, apparently, seeking for words to express it, with his brain in a whirl.

As they walked slowly the girl breathed heavily two or three times, as if awakening from sleep.

"You will have to give her a woman's tendance, Lucille," Robert said. "She has had some rough handling. I brought her to you not knowing what else to do."

The expression of his voice told his wife that he was hurt in some way, but whether only mentally strained, or physically, she could not decide.

"What is the matter with you, dear husband?" she asked.

"A slight scratch; nothing of any consequence. Longstaffe will attend to me. You will come back as soon as you have seen to the girl?"

"Yes, of course—immediately."

They passed through the doorway and entered the passage leading to the front hall.

By this time the girl had come more to herself. Lucille called her own maid. Together they

helped her up the great staircase, and took her to one of the spare rooms. Madam Darcy ordered a posset to be prepared, and managed to get the stranger to swallow some of it, after she had been undressed and put to bed.

Lucille hurried back to her husband. She found him in the room he used for transacting business, which looked out over the river. He was sitting back, his head against the leather of the chair, his face white in contrast with his dark hair.

Madam Darcy feared she knew not what. She ran over and knelt by his side.

"What is it, heart-of-my-life?" she cried. "There is something very wrong. Something has happened, and you are keeping it from me?"

He smiled down upon her, but the smile was more sad than any tears.

"Nay, wife, I have not yet had the opportunity of telling you; and never in my life, since we were one, have I kept aught back from you of the things I knew myself."

Lucille looked ~~into~~ into his eyes, as she went over mentally what he had said, and compared it with the experience which lay behind; it was true they had kept nothing back from one another; they had had no secrets; sorrows and joys had linked them together, they had met them with open face, shoulder to shoulder, like true comrades.

She laid her hand upon his shoulder ; he winced at her touch.

"You are hurt !" she cried, "wounded !—there has been a fight ?"

"It is nothing," he responded, "a touch of my Lord Devizes' sword which will soon heal." He stopped abruptly, a contraction, almost a spasm, passed across his mouth ; he gulped ; after a minute or two he went on : "He paid for it, I am afraid, with his life."

Lucille started back with horror. The announcement came so abruptly that it produced the more effect ; those were days in which duels took place daily ; in which blood was shed like water ; but these two had lived a quiet life, away from the moil of the streets, the stress of jealousy and faction, the fruit of rapine and lust.

"You killed him !" Lucille screamed and drew back a little from him ; it jarred upon her to think, that the hand which had so often clasped hers was dyed with a man's life-blood.

"Else should I not be here," he remarked gravely, not failing to notice her gesture ; "and that poor child would have been left to a fate worse than death."

"Then she was the cause of it all ?" Lucille asked, and something of the feeling she had had before came back to her.

After a pause Robert said : " I had better tell you, sweetheart, what happened from the beginning ; God has brought a great and unexpected trouble upon us, and we shall have to bear it together."

His tone was very sad and solemn, conveying foreboding to the heart of his listener.

" Tell me all," she said, " all !"

" It would not be right of me to keep it back ; I was longer with Master Gaythorpe, in St. Martin's Fields, than I expected to-day ; he had papers to consult me about ; some difficulty as to title-deeds of part of the property we are purchasing. When I left his house it was already dark, sooner than usual, owing to the clouds in the sky."

As he spoke they could hear the pattering of rain against the window.

" I noticed it," Lucille answered.

" As luck would have it," Robert continued, " I had only ridden a couple of hundred yards or so, when Sultan stumbled over some loose stones by the side of the kennel and cast a shoe ; it took me some time to find a farrier, being misdirected more than once. As I had to lead Sultan carefully in the darkness, fearing to lame him, the roads being so broken, another hour was lost before I could start afresh on my way home. I have not been in London so late since His Majesty began his reign, and was surprised to find that even the principal streets were given up

to gangs of men evidently on evil deeds intent. Old Oliver, whom God knows I did not love, would have made short work with many of them ; however, I loosened my sword from its scabbard, and took care to have a well-primed pistol ready to my hand. Once a touch was laid on Sultan's bridle, but when my assailant saw I was ready to deal him a blow, he made off, with a curse."

"Oh ! Robert !" Lucille exclaimed, "you shall not ride after nightfall alone again ; why did you not take Longstaffe with you ?"

"I am not likely to have the chance, sweetheart," he answered grimly ; "the worst is yet to come ; I was in a street, I cannot name, never having passed through it before that I know of ; I was following the direction the farrier had given me when I heard the shrill cries of a girl in great distress."

Lucille was listening breathlessly ; she laid her hand on her fast-beating heart.

Robert proceeded : "I galloped in the direction of the sound as fast as I could, and found three men, with a maid in the midst of them, in a waste spot between two shops, which were shut and dark. They had muffled her head with a cloak, and were dragging her along ; I could distinguish her light dress among their dark habits and the slightness of her form, as now and again the cloak disclosed it. I spurred Sultan into the midst of them, and bade them stop."

"You could do nothing else, Robert, being what you are."

"Yes, sweetheart, I should do it again in similar circumstances; I feel that; although I bitterly regret it. There were three swords directed at me in a trice, and instantly there was a clash of steel as we thrust and parried enough to wake the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. I was mounted; they were on foot; Sultan answered to my touch as if he had been a war-horse, broken and trained. I received a slight wound in my shoulder, but the swordsman exposed his breast; and the others pressing upon me, my life being in jeopardy, I took advantage of my opportunity and passed my blade through his side. As the man fell, a voice I seemed to recognize cried: 'God's blood! he has killed my Lord Devizes'; the two others ran to the wounded man, so, bending over, I took the chance to swing the maid to my saddle."

"My brave Robert," Lucille cried, "who could blame you for what you did in self-defence, and in protection of that poor child." For now Lucille's heart went out to her, remembering how young, and tender, and modest she looked, lying in the great four-post bed, as she had left her; her feeling was widely different from what it had been when she first saw her in her husband's arm.

"The watch," Robert went on, "hearing the clash

of arms, ran towards us, with lanterns. As the light flashed upon us one of the men rode up, and looked me in the face——”

He broke off; there was a choke in his voice, and with difficulty he added what followed: “In the man, who had been one of my assailants, I recognized His Grace of Buckingham; I am sure he knew me from the first. He said: ‘So it is you, Captain Robert Darcy, who interfere with gentlemen out for a night’s pleasure; well! you have killed my Lord Devizes, and by God! you shall sleep in the Tower this very night, and when, by the Lord Harry! I see you again it will be on the road to the block.’ ‘You are a coward, Duke,’ I answered, being in hot blood, ‘what I have done I did in my own defence, and that of this maid, who cried for help, and was like to suffer worse than death at your hands.’ The other man, who had turned his back all this time, whispered something to His Grace; together they seized upon the body of their companion, and bore it rapidly away. By the time the watchmen came up—which they accomplished as slowly as might be, until they saw the field was clear, and only one man on horseback left—there was little to show that a man had been killed, only somewhat of blood in the roadway. God forgive me that it should be true.” Darcy shuddered as he said the words.

Lucille clasped more tightly the hands which were

resting on his knee, but said nothing ; her heart was too full for words.

"The watch questioned me," he went on, "but I merely replied, that I had rescued the maid from some men who were trying to carry her off. One of the watch recognized the girl to be the daughter of a furrier, who dealt much with the gentlemen of the Court ; the tradesman he knew to have left home—he believed, on an errand to foreign parts. Doubtless the whole thing had been planned and the girl decoyed out on some pretext or other. As there seemed no one to take care of her, and the watch gave her an excellent name as a well-behaved, modest girl, I brought her on here to thy protection, sweetheart."

"And who is to protect you, Robert ?" she exclaimed. "His Grace of Buckingham hates you already ; he is high in favour with the King, and, as I have heard, not one to forgive or forget."

"I had best flee," Darcy answered gloomily ; "justice is but a mockery in this land, else would I abide by it. I will get across to France until this affair blows over, and happier days come."

"Nay," Lucille answered, "in France they will give you up, if King Charles asks for you." Then a sudden thought struck her ; "Why not ride to Grangeland, and lie hid in the secret room behind

the chapel ; I will go to the Abbey, and we can be together after nightfall."

Barely had the words passed her lips, before there came a loud knocking at the outer door of the entrance hall, just beneath them.

Lucille uttered a little cry, even Robert turned a shade whiter, the sound was so ominous and unexpected in its suddenness.

"Open ! open ! in the King's name !"

Robert threw up the window, Lucille standing by his side with a hand on his shoulder ; the rain-drops pattered upon them, the chill of the autumn night struck upon their senses, in sympathy with the dread which gripped their hearts. Lights could be seen at intervals, the house was surrounded.

"His Grace has been expeditious," Robert said bitterly. Then as the sound of the great door being unbarred came to their ears, he turned and embraced his wife tenderly ; her tears fell fast.

"It is the end of it all," he cried ; "I must see the children before I leave you."

"I will go to the King," Lucille cried ; "I will claim his mercy, nay, his justice, even in the face of his false friend, the Duke of Buckingham."

"It is useless," Robert said, in tones so low, and deep and hopeless, that they pierced the heart of his wife ; "the third man had on the King's mantle of ermine about his shoulders."

Lucille was aware of the reputation of His Majesty as regards these midnight escapades.

She fainted. When she came to herself her women were tending her.

The house was desolate.

CHAPTER VIII

TOWER AND SENTENCE

ON the following day Mistress Darcy was confined to her bed with great dizziness and nausea ; she strove to rise, longing to go to her husband, or at any rate find out for herself what was happening, but it was a physical impossibility.

In the afternoon she was sufficiently better to be partially dressed by her tire-women, and to sit on a fauteuil, with her feet supported by a footstool. Nothing had been heard of Robert since the previous night ; Longstaffe had ridden off, by his mistress's orders, to ascertain the condition of affairs, and bring back a report ; he had not yet returned. The suspense and alarm which Mistress Darcy felt, and, to a lesser extent, her whole household, may be better imagined than described. Coming on the top of all she had gone through the day before, it brought about a paralysis of her spirits ; she seemed incapable of thought, as her body was of action.

Dr. Ambrose Fletcher did his best to express and

stimulate a feeling of hope ; had it not been for his advanced age, he would have gone himself to seek for information. Harold asked continuously for his father, and was not altogether satisfied when he was told he was away on business. The child had no doubt heard some of the whisperings of the servants.

So the long day wore on, until the curtains were drawn about the windows and candles lighted in the sconces. The feeling of home comfort, the luxury which surrounded Lucille only served to intensify her despondency ; she thought of the happy years which lay behind her, of her husband's constant care and attention ; where was he at this moment ? A prisoner ! doubtless, suffering all the rigours of confinement ; suffering most of all in the isolation from those he loved, in the thought of what lay before him, the serious charge, and its more than possible *dénouement*.

As Lucille thought of these things she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears, an exhibition of feeling so unwonted with her that it filled her servants with alarm ; yet was it the best thing that could have happened, affording her relief, and when she had dried her eyes, strength and fortitude had been given her to bear what was coming.

At about the same hour of the clock that Captain

Darcy had returned the day before—how much longer it seemed—there was a great knocking at the outer gate.

Mistress Darcy had given orders that Longstaffe should be shown to her room immediately on his return; she now waited impatiently, every moment appearing an eternity.

At length she heard his footsteps, and the jingle of his spurs as he walked along the uncarpeted passage, behind a maid who showed him up. She strove to rise, but sank back again into her chair, blood surging to her brain, and throbbing in her temples.

Longstaffe made his reverence when he was ushered in.

“Tell me quickly what has happened to your master, and what you have heard, keep nothing back.”

Longstaffe related in his blunt fashion, which failed to conceal the depth of feeling beneath, all he had to tell. He had been directed to Bow Street, and there learnt that Captain Darcy had been put into the dock, and after some proceedings sent back to the Tower, where he had lain the previous night. His master had caught sight of him at the back of the court, and managed to convey him a signal to follow. He had done so, and, after some delay, had received a sealed missive for his mistress.

With eager and trembling fingers, Lucille tore it open. It ran as follows:

“Dearest heart-of-my-life,—I am writing this by the kind consent and connivance of Sir Ralph Abercromby, Lieutenant of the Tower, whom God reward for his goodness to me. I was brought up at Bow Street this morning, on the King’s warrant, signed by His Majesty in person, accused of the murder of my Lord Devizes. His Grace of Buckingham was present, sitting on the bench by the magistrate, and indeed directing the proceedings. He is very bitter against me. I had to confess to the fact that the Lord Devizes died by my hand; but when I would have offered my defence, the magistrate closed proceedings, and committed me to take my trial at the Court of His Majesty’s Bench. I am informed that the case will come on shortly. Thou must be up and doing, sweetheart; and get Master Gaythorpe to help thee, so that we may make the best defence possible. Yet do I doubt the result; for my enemies are all powerful, and they do propose to bring this affair to an issue which shall compass my undoing. Yet, pray I with the Psalmist of old: ‘*Inclina Domine, aurem tuam, et exaudi me: quoniam inops et pauper sum ego. Custodi animam meam, quoniam sanctus sum; saluum fac servum tuum, Deus meus sperantem in te.*’

"May God keep thee, my sweetheart, and our children, under the shadow of His wings, prays thy loving husband,

"ROBERT DARCY."

Ten days passed after the receipt of that brave and tender letter, days of intense anxiety and suspense. They were occupied by consultations with the lawyers, generally Mistress Darcy going to St. Martin's Fields; but twice Gaythorpe came to her at Kingston, when she was too indisposed to undertake the journey to him.

Lucille was permitted to see her husband three times in the week, but never alone, a warder always being present. These visits constituted a great strain upon her powers of endurance; her heart sank within her as the barge conveyed her to the fatal steps at the "Traitors' Gate," through which so many prisoners had passed to their doom, during the centuries since the Tower was built; the grim porteullis, the massive arched doorway, the small cell, with its solid walls, the thickness of which was shown where the small window jutted out over the courtyard below; the continual roaring of the lions, from their enclosure towards Tower Hill; all these things served to accentuate the depression, consequent upon the serious charge under which Robert lay. Only the consciousness of his innocence and rectitude,

only her own faith in God prevented a breakdown, which might have seriously undermined her health.

One thing that surprised both the lawyers and Mistress Darcy was the fact that Anne Pembury, the girl Robert had rescued and brought home, had been summoned by the Attorney-General to appear at the Court on behalf of the prosecution.

The girl had recovered her bodily health to a great extent, but her mind was still weak and confused. She had grown to be much attached to Mistress Darcy, who had shown her great kindness and consideration; she still lay at the house at Kingston, as her father had not yet returned, and the person who had been left in charge of his household was ill of a low fever, requiring tendance herself. Master Gaythorpe, and with him the counsel he had engaged, had regarded Anne Pembury as the principal witness on Captain Darcy's behalf, and even the lawyers could not suggest by what ingenuity her evidence could be made to tell on the other side.

The day of trial arrived at last. Lucille had not slept throughout the night; her beautiful face was white and wan, with dark circles under her eyes; Robert Darcy, too, showed signs of what he had passed through, strands of grey appeared in his hair and in his moustache, otherwise he bore himself with that calm dignity, that quiet self-respect and con-

fidence, which never left him throughout this terrible time.

Master Sawyer, afterwards celebrated as Sir Robert, led for Captain Darcy, but he had no witnesses, the one who could have told all being in the dock before the Judge. His Grace of Buckingham was uncomfortable and restless in giving his evidence; his appearance was more dishevelled than usual, as if he had primed himself for this undertaking by days and nights of dissipation; he could not look towards the prisoner, who fixed him with a steady gaze throughout.

The Duke's evidence was a tissue of lies, so presented as to make them appear natural and true; it was he who "walking with my Lord Devizes did hear cries, and running up to a waste place discovered Captain Robert Darcy, whom he knew slightly, sufficient to recognize him, lifting up a half-dead girl on to his saddle; they interfered on behalf of the maid, whereupon swords were drawn, and before the watch could come up my Lord Devizes was mortally hurt, being pierced through the heart. Captain Darcy was the aggressor throughout; he and his friends acting only in self-defence."

Master Sawyer did ask His Grace about the third who was present, whereupon the Duke answered that he "was a stranger who had also run up, no doubt attracted by the noise, that he was so cloaked he should not know him again, and in the confusion,

after he had helped to remove my Lord Devizes, he had disappeared without explanation ; no doubt misliking being involved in the affair."

Asked why they removed the body of my Lord Devizes so quickly, instead of waiting for the watch to come up, His Grace averred with great plausibility, "he knew of a chirurgcon close by, with whose help he hoped, if taken in time, the blood might be stanchd and my Lord Devizes brought to, again."

All Master Sawyer's efforts to shake the Duke in his examination failed, indeed they rather made the case worse, as he added other details which appeared to tell against Captain Darcy, almost as if spoken with some reluctance.

Lucille nearly fainted while this evidence was being given ; she could have cried out at its utter untruthfulness, but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, and indeed in her heart she recognized the futility of such a protest.

The Judge dropped out one or two remarks which showed sufficiently the way he believed the case to be going, and perhaps was not reluctant that it should.

Two of the watch were next called, who testified that, "hearing cries, and afterwards the clash of arms, they had hurried up, but had come upon the scene too late ; they had only found the prisoner in

the dock with the girl in his arms, and believing his story, not knowing murder had been committed, they had permitted him to go, having first, however, taken the precaution to ascertain his name and address. Anne Pembury was well known to them as the daughter of a neighbouring tradesman."

Master Sawyer would have got from them what Robert Darcy had said, but was overruled from the bench, the Judge declaring it was not admissible as evidence.

The last witness was Anne Pembury herself. She had been sitting at Mistress Darcy's side, and had to be supported to the box, where she was permitted to sit. Her youth and extreme whiteness created a wave of sympathy in the court, and many looks, especially on the part of the women, were directed against Captain Darcy, who bore them with manly dignity, which, as was known afterwards, caused a few to wonder if right, after all, was not on his side.

The Attorney, rising in his seat, turned to the Judge and said:

"My Lord, seeing the condition of this young person I will not detain her, except to ask three questions as shortly as possible."

The Judge looked at Mr. Attorney significantly:

"Her evidence is hardly necessary," he said, with slow emphasis. Then his Lordship looked at the jury, who seemed to the court to signify assent.

"Do you know, madam, who carried you off?"

A hardly audible "No, sir," was the answer.

"Could you identify any one whom you saw on that night?"

"No, sir; I was so confused."

"Where did you find yourself when you recovered consciousness?"

"In the house of Captain Robert Darey."

Mr. Attorney thereupon sat down.

Master Sawyer then rose, and said:

"I have the same consideration for this young person, my Lord, as Mr. Attorney; but in the interests of my client, I am obliged to ask something further." Then, turning to Mistress Anne: "Have you ever seen the prisoner in the dock before?"

The girl looked at Robert, faltered, then said:

"I do not think so, sir. Then she added: "I am not sure; so many gentlemen come to my father in the way of business."

Mr. Attorney turned and nodded at this response to the barrister sitting by his side, and seemed well pleased thereat.

Master Sawyer tried again:

"On the night in question, madam, were there not three who had to do with trying to carry you off?"

There was a breathless pause after this question; the whole court waiting for the answer, on which so

much depended. Mistress Anne put her hand to her brow, and seemed like to faint. At last she said—and the usher of the court had to repeat the words they were so low: “I heard some one running; I screamed and fell—there was something in the road—I do not remember any more.”

Master Sawyer sat down as one baffled; Mr. Attorney rose up with a smirk of satisfaction:

“I do not need to trouble this young lady further.”

Lucille hardly heard a connected syllable of what followed; there was a buzzing in her ears, voices seemed to come from afar, to cross one another, as if they were strands of some complex web, she could not separate imagination from reality, what was false from what was real. She gathered that the Judge summed up against her husband, as he could not fail to do under the circumstances, although probably the result would have been the same had the evidence been the other way, most of the Judges being venal, open to the arguments of either influence or the purse; His Grace of Buckingham could command both.

The jury had no need to leave the box, the word guilty came out clear and distinct, smiting like a sword the heart of her whose husband was thus pronounced. The sound of that monosyllable pursued Lucille through the days and nights that followed.

Captain Darcy accepted the verdict as one stunned,

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his mouth went awry once, wincing when the tones of the foreman of the jury echoed through the court ; then he drew himself up to hear the sentence of condemnation, making no appeal, offering no further objection beyond the simple words :

“I interfered to prevent a wrong ; I am innocent of anything which stains the honour of a gentleman.”

CHAPTER IX

A FRUITLESS ERRAND

ROBERT DARCY was taken back to the Tower after sentence had been duly pronounced. Lucille was led away more dead than alive, and conveyed in her own barge to Kingston.

It was almost night by the time she arrived, a chill air came up from the river, penetrating beneath her cloak in sympathy with the fear which was about her heart, with the blood which ran cold through her veins.

Dr. Ambrose Fletcher had been by her side throughout the trial, and he it was who helped her to land, and gave her an arm up the grass slope to the French windows, through which she passed ; his own heart sank even while he tried to comfort her, and to suggest that such a travesty of justice could not take place in England. He remembered the fate of noble Sir Harry Vane who had died, on Tower Hill, protesting his faith in God, and loyalty to the King ; others, too, as noble, as great, perhaps as good, had paid the last penalty under the open vault of heaven.

Robert's elder brother, created my Lord Darcy at the Restoration, came post-haste to London to render what help he could, but his influence was slight, and could not weigh for a second in the scale against the all-powerful faction which was pressing Captain Darcy to his doom. Lucille had to bear much from the innocent prattlings and questions of her children; little Harold and even his sister lisped the same question: "Would father return to keep Christmas Day with them?" For Robert, grave at other times, sedate of mien, was ever merry with the little ones, and especially did teach them to set great store on the joys of Yule. Thankful indeed was Lucille that his mother, and her father, had been called to their rest before this terrible blow fell on the fortunes of the family.

As for Anne Pembury, when she was better, and understood what her evidence had helped to do, she was like to have died of grief, bitterly regretting her own weakness of intellect on the day of the trial; she would have gone on her knees to the Judge if, by doing so, she could have saved the man whom her fear and confusion of mind and memory had destroyed. Now that it was too late she could have declared, without hesitation, that men, none of whom was Captain Robert Darcy, had striven to seize her when she fled from them.

Mistress Darcy's first thought was of the Duke of Albemarle, the man whose influence was superior to even that of the Duke of Buckingham, he who had

made the King, and become from plain George Monk the first subject of the realm. Years had passed since Robert had served him in camp and field, since the great man had himself been a guest at Grangeland Abbey, but Lucille hoped to recall his memory, to stir him to act on behalf of her husband.

Dr. Fletcher eagerly seconded the idea ; they went together to the house hard by Whitehall, which the Duke had received from his grateful country.

Alas ! the hopes of the visitors fell when they entered the quadrangle, which separated the great gate of the outer courtyard from the inhabited part of the house ; an ominous quiet was upon it all, servants went about with dejected faces and stooping shoulders, their attitude seemed to express either fear or grief.

"Can I be permitted to the presence of His Grace ?" Mistress Darcy inquired of the major-domo, an old soldier who had served under the General both in land and sea engagements.

"May I ask your name, madam ?"

"I am Mistress Darcy," Lucille faltered. It smote her that, for the first time, she should have to say who she was with a sense of shame ; proud had she been, proud was she still, of bearing Robert Darcy's name, but she winced to think how differently the world regarded it, now that her husband was convicted and condemned, from the estimation it had a short time previously.

"The wife of Captain Robert Darcy ?" Greswell,

the major-domo, inquired, with grave concern, his sympathy appearing in his voice.

"The same," she answered, she could hardly speak for tears, "my husband was General Monk's aide-de-camp when he marched from Edinburgh to London."

Greswell bowed deferentially: "I know it well, madam, I served under the Captain, and took the General's orders from him many times."

"You have heard what has happened?" she asked.

"Yes, madam, with bitter regret; few have felt it more."

"I am *his wife*," she said simply, as if that placed her on a pinnacle of grief alone.

"True, madam; none can feel as you do."

Here Dr. Fletcher interposed, seeing that Lucille found it difficult to say more: "Mistress Darcy would see His Grace," he said, "he knew her husband well in the old days, and we hope might even now intervene, the Duke's influence being so great with His Majesty."

"You have not heard, then, Reverend Sir——"

"Heard what?" Lucille cried, affected to despondency by the man's tone.

"The Duke is seriously ill, dying, we are afraid; the dropsy of long standing has gone to his heart."

"I am distressed to hear it," Lucille said, "but my husband's life hangs on a thread; would it not be possible for me to see His Grace?—a word—a line from him."

"I will take you into his presence, madam ; you shall judge for yourself, although all visitors are forbidden."

"I thank you with all my heart," Mistress Darcy replied.

"Kindly wait a minute or two ; I will ascertain that all is ready for your reception." Greswell turned to her as he went out to add : "I pray you not to build upon it, madam ; His Grace is so weak that he has not full command of his faculties." The old servant said this with evident reluctance, his affection for his master, and the pride he felt in him, clearly intimated by the tones of his voice.

Mistress Darcy paced the room. Dr. Fletcher was sitting down, he was weary, nor merely physically but mentally, his great age rendering him unfit to cope with this new burden.

Lucille was praying, her hands clasped, her eyes uplifted ; she looked curiously sweet, refined by her sorrow ; her face had lost its roundness, but had gained in expression, a depth was added to her eyes, a pathos lent to her mouth ; the soul purified by fire, never afterwards failed to express in her countenance all that she endured at this period. To those who loved her she took on an added attraction and enhanced charm, but to the world she seemed to have lost the grace that goes with youth, to have left behind her those rounded contours, which, once lost, never recur.

Ten minutes passed ; the major-domo reappeared. "This way, madam," he said. Then looking at Dr. Fletcher : "I am only allowed to admit one visitor, and your stay, madam," he put in, "must be as short as possible ; the physician is in the ante-room."

Mistress Darcy followed Greswell up the great staircase, which was softly carpeted from Eastern looms, along a corridor, then, through a smaller apartment, to the large bedroom occupied by the Duke.

His Grace was propped up in the great bed, a middle-aged woman on the further side of it had just taken a glass from his hand. Lucille was shocked to see his appearance—white, drawn, emaciated, old, with a flabbiness in his pendulous cheeks which emphasized the shrinking of the rest of his body.

For a moment the sight of the great man, and compassion for his condition, almost overshadowed the purport of her visit in Mistress Darcy's mind. She had seen General Monk in his hour of strength and responsibility, when the eyes of all England were fixed upon him ; when his strong, rugged face conveyed a sense of confidence, of trust, and reliance to all who looked upon it ; now all this was gone, the fine ship was on the rocks, a wreck fast passing to dissolution.

The Duke turned his eyes towards her but not his

head; Lucille crossed the room with light footfall and knelt down, clasping her hands on the coverlet.

"I am indeed sorry to have to trouble Your Grace; believe me, I should not do so unless I was in terrible stress, and there was no other way."

The Duke muttered something which was inaudible. His eyes, which were yellow and blood-shot, rested on the face of the kneeling woman; then he turned towards his attendant as if for some explanation.

It was given by Greswell, who was still standing just within the door; he now came forward to the foot of the bed:

"This lady, Your Grace, is the wife of Captain Robert Darcy of the Coldstreamers."

At the last word the Duke's attention was aroused, his eyes flashed for a moment; probably no experience in his life had stood out so vividly as the time of that great march, which was for ever connected with the name given, by general consent, to the army which followed Monk out of Scotland, and effected the deliverance of the kingdom.

"Captain Darcy lies under sentence in the Tower," Greswell went on, "convicted of the death of my Lord Devizes in a duel——"

He stopped; it was useless to proceed further; the Duke's eyes had closed, his attention had gone, he was not listening.

Mistress Darcy glanced appealingly at Greswell;

hope had almost died out; her look said, "Can nothing be done to rouse him?"

"His Grace of Buckingham, who had a private quarrel against Captain Darcy, is determined for his death," Greswell tried once more.

Mention of the King's favourite again roused the sleeping lion; he looked more alert, more intelligent than he had appeared, since Lucille had been permitted to enter the room.

"Buckingham! Did you say Buckingham, Greswell?"

"Yes, Your Grace; he hates Captain Darcy, and has determined his death."

"Then it will go hardly with him," Albemarle commented, dropping each word out with slow emphasis.

Lucille stood up; she held out her hands appealingly: "You can save him, Your Grace, you only. Ah! do you not remember how kind you were when you came to my father's house; I was a child then, now I am a married woman, I have my children, I *had*—my husband——" Emotion choked her further utterance, a great sob came up in her throat.

The Duke appeared to be using all the faculties he possessed, trying to clear away the clouds which were over his mind, and to remember. At length he said: "What is it you want; what can I do?"

"Oh! Your Grace, you can save my husband! You have power with the King greater than his

enemy ; I pray you write one line to His Majesty, to ask my husband's life, my husband's freedom ! ”

The effort he was making proved too much for the Duke's feeble faculties, the flush, which had been on his cheeks during the last minute or two, died away into a great pallor.

There was a step across the apartment, a tall, thin man wearing a long flowing wig came forward and touched Mistress Darcy on the shoulder : “ You must go at once, madam,” he said, “ I cannot be responsible for my patient's life unless he is kept quite undisturbed.”

Lucille glanced at the Duke ; he had lapsed into complete unconsciousness.

She turned away with such a look on her face that no one who saw it would ever forget.

CHAPTER X

A WELCOME VISITOR

MISTRESS DARCY knew but little of her journey back to her home at Kingston after the interview. Dr. Fletcher cared for her as he might have done for a child. She was escorted by two men-servants, one of whom was Longstaffe; the last named had hoped great things from this visit to the Duke, remembering him in his days of greatness, and, failing to realize, or believe in the change which had come, his disappointment was all the more keen, when his mistress and the chaplain issued from the Duke's house, with that look upon their faces which told its own tale.

Only a week now remained before the sentence was to be carried out. On the following morning Dr. Fletcher accosted Lucille on the staircase, directly she issued from her own apartment.

"Madam," he said, "we must go to the fountain-head of justice—to His Majesty himself; we have failed with His Grace of Albemarle, but we may succeed with the King."

“‘The fountain of justice,’” Lucille exclaimed, remembering what her husband thought as to the third man in the fatal fray; “but how if the fountain itself is tainted?”

“God forbid,” replied Dr. Fletcher; “let us not believe it, dear lady, without proof.”

But, alas! proof of a kind, at any rate of a royal prejudice, was immediately forthcoming. Efforts were made by my Lord Darcy and others of high rank, connections or friends of the family, to arrange an interview with His Majesty without success; the King refused to see either Madam Darcy or her brother-in-law.

About this time King Charles moved out of London, and took up his residence at Hampton Court; it was announced that he was indisposed, but Mistress Darcy had word on good authority that the King’s *malaise* was of the spirit rather than of the flesh. The King was hedged in from all access by Robert Darcy’s enemies, inspired by one man, and by the relatives of the slain nobleman, as a meadow is girt about by a quick-set hedge.

As the days wore on, and the fatal day approached, Lucille’s heart lay like lead within her breast; she neither ate nor slept; her limbs dragged heavily when she walked. Robert Darcy, too, whom his wife was permitted to see every day, but still not alone, had lost all hope; he had grown very thin and stooped; his face was lined with care; a shadow

rested even on the heads of their children, and they seemed incapable of play, although nothing had been expressly told them of the fate which overhung their father.

One day Lucille was sitting in her boudoir, her head buried in her hands, when a knock came at the door, and before she could answer, or gather together her scattered senses, a strange lady was ushered into the room. Lucille was too numbed with pain, too surprised, to get upon her feet ; she could only gaze with wide-open eyes in wonderment at the newcomer. Even preoccupied as she was, she could not but appreciate the extraordinary beauty of the lady who came across and laid her hand upon her shoulder : tall, with a slight figure, simply yet very elegantly dressed, she had discarded for the occasion all those ornaments, which women of rank affected at this period more than any other.

"Madam," she said, "I know your trouble, and I am come to offer you help."

Lucille's lip quivered. "I am afraid," she said, "my case is beyond help"—yet something in the other's manner held her, attracted her—"it is very good of you," she added.

"Nay," the stranger replied ; "we are knit together by the common tie of womanhood ; it is our duty to assist one another, and I have come for that purpose."

"In what way ?" Lucille asked.

"I can gain you admittance to His Majesty!"

"Then are you indeed a friend," Lucille cried, seizing her hand; at the same time she looked at her closely, wondering again who she might be, and how she came to know the story of her need; surely this was one of the most beautiful women in the world. "I do not know you," she went on.

A half smile flickered over the girl's face, showing two rows of pearly teeth. "I am Frances Stuart," she announced.

But to Mistress Darcy this conveyed nothing, as she had lived a life of seclusion, hearing little of the Court, and of the fine ladies who had influence there.

Frances Stuart, afterwards Duchess of Richmond, filled at this time a unique position, sought by all, loved by the King, and yet respected, moving in high places with a calm dignity and restraint, which gave her a power second to none.

"You have not been to the Palace much of late, madam?"

"I have never gone there."

Miss Stuart smiled; the remark conveyed more than it was intended to do. "We are not all tainted," she said, "and the King, believe me, has his good side for those who can get access to it."

"God grant it," Lucille cried.

"At any rate, I can bring you into His Majesty's presence, and once there you can plead your own cause."

"I shall ever pray for you, if you can attain me that."

"I have come for that purpose," Miss Stuart said; "only last night I overheard His Grace of Buckingham boast of what he had done, when he had taken too much wine, and knew not that I was only separated from him by a piece of tapestry; he said he had 'given strict injunctions that no one should see the King on behalf of your husband until his revenge was complete.' I made up my mind," she went on quietly, "that you should see His Majesty to-day."

"To-day!" Lucille said, jumping up, a new hope dawning in her heart, a new energy in her life's blood.

"Yes! immediately; my barge is at the stairs; the King lies, as you know, at Hampton; I will take you there at once."

It all seemed too wonderful to be true.

"I am ready now!" Mistress Darcy exclaimed.

Miss Stuart shook her head. "The King is a man—and you are a woman; go not to him dishevelled, spend half-an-hour with your tire-women, I can wait and will eat something; believe me, the time will not be wasted on either side."

Although little more than twenty, Frances Stuart had all the aplomb and confidence of one half as old again. Mistress Darcy felt she could not do better than place herself entirely in her hands.

She rang the bell, and ordered refreshments to

be served in the small dining-room down-stairs, and then allowed her maids to adorn her after a fashion she had thought never to suffer again; they wondering greatly, meanwhile.

In half-an-hour Lucille rejoined Miss Stuart, handsomely gowned with lace, ribbons and rich silk.

Miss Stuart looked her over and seemed not ill-pleased. She then led the way to her barge, which was rowed by men dressed in her livery.

As they went past Teddington Miss Stuart asked: "How often have you seen the King, Mistress Darcy?"

"On two occasions," Lucille replied, her heart fluttering as she thought of the coming opportunity, which even now she doubted if it would ever be accorded.

"I see His Majesty every day," Miss Stuart commented, with an odd little uplifting of her nose which conveyed nothing to Lucille sitting by her side. "As you know, he is not a beauty, yet," she added, "are there beauties not so handsome as he, including His Grace of Buckingham!"

What Frances Stuart meant by this enigma Lucille did not at that time understand, but the words somehow carried back her mind to her own impressions, when she first saw Charles a fugitive, with a price on his head; a child then, she had first thought him plain, almost repulsive, afterwards his attraction had

compelled her ; as these thoughts passed across her mind, she laid her hand on the royal signet ring which still rested beneath her dress, although of late she had been tempted to fling it from her.

Soon after this the barge stopped at an awning which led up into the lovely terraced walk, a private way to the King's palace at Hampton. Miss Stuart conducted her companion by side-paths through the gardens, which were laid out in Dutch fashion with exceeding care and primness. The weather was beautifully open and mild for the time of the year. This part of the royal enclosure was almost deserted save for a man working here and there. The tinkle of laughter and the sounds of distant voices came from some other part of the royal domain.

As the fateful moment approached Mistress Darcy's heart sank proportionately ; she doubted whether Miss Stuart would be able to keep her word, and bring her into the presence of the King ; even if she succeeded, would His Majesty listen to her ? If this failed she knew her last hope was dead, her husband's fate sealed ; surely never in the world's history did woman endure more than Lucille during those moments.

Miss Stuart must have known something of what she was suffering, for she linked her arm into Mistress Darcy's, and whispered, "Courage, in five minutes you will be with the King ; mind, you are fighting for the life of your husband."

She looked into Lucille's eyes as if to convey confidence and inspire her with hope.

They passed through open windows into a long empty room, set round with splendid pictures in gilded frames. There Miss Stuart left Mistress Darcy, a prey to every emotion of which woman's heart is capable.

The seconds of waiting seemed like minutes; the minutes dragged like hours. Mistress Darcy sat down, then rose up, paced the room, listening for every sound, trying to interpret things which came to her from distant parts of the Palace, the subdued hum of voices, the shutting of doors—with that absorption in one idea which is incident to intense feeling, especially suspense. She imagined that quite ordinary happenings had to do with her own errand.

When Miss Stuart actually did return she entered the apartment unheard, Lucille having her back turned. With light footfall she crossed the room and tapped her protégée on the shoulder.

Lucille started, she was not aware that any one was in the room; colour dyed her cheeks, then faded away.

"Do not be afraid," Miss Stuart said. "All is as I hoped. The King has only his brother, the Duke of York, with him; better he than any one else. He is a hard man, but just, and not easily influenced by Buckingham and his set. The two brothers have

been talking on some important business. I find that His Majesty has given orders that no one should be admitted to the closet, until their interview is over."

"But will not His Majesty be angry if his orders are disobeyed, and so be set against my petition?" Lucille asked, laying her agitated grasp upon Miss Stuart's arm, by way of emphasizing the question.

"His Majesty is only angry with those who bore him," Miss Stuart replied. "Come, I will take all responsibility; the sooner we are in the presence the better, for the King and Prince have already been together longer than was expected."

Miss Stuart conducted her companion down the passage, which was illuminated by silver lamps, although it was daytime; at the further end a door was concealed by a heavy curtain, with embroidered fleurs-de-lis running its whole length; seeing the emblem, and remembering what was on her ring, Lucille took it as an omen of good hope, and breathed more freely than she had done since she left the barge.

A groom of the chambers was standing before the curtain; he drew it on one side at a sign from Frances Stuart. The latter opened a door noiselessly, and went in; before doing so just touching Lucille's hand with the tips of her fingers.

They were in the presence.

King Charles was sitting in a massive high-backed arm-chair, curiously carved ; a long-eared dog on his knee, and another apparently asleep between his feet. A short bark from the more wide-awake of the pair greeted their entry, the other dog raised his nose, sniffed, then settled down again, but with eyes directed towards the intruders.

Behind the King's chair stood the Duke of York ; he was leaning forward, seemingly suggesting something, perhaps urging it upon His Majesty, who was not readily convinced.

When the dog barked the King turned ; his face suggested relief at the interruption, as if he was not sorry to postpone an answer to his brother's proposal.

Miss Stuart advanced straight towards the King ; she had assumed a totally different mien upon her entrance ; she had been all sympathy, womanly tenderness, a simple lady of the Court ; now she put on a stately dignity, which well became her beautiful face and tall figure.

Mistress Darcy stood quite still in the semi-obscurity by the doorway.

"Zounds, Frances ! so you have returned. Well, the King is pleased that for once his orders to admit no one have been disobeyed"—His Majesty nodded pleasantly—"for you are above all commands ; besides you have come opportunely to arbitrate in a

matter we have been discussing, and not agreeing upon, my brother of York and myself."

At this point King Charles perceived Mistress Darcy; his already swarthy skin darkened visibly.

"But whom have we here? By the Rood! this passes even my allowance;" he half rose from his seat, and both the dogs barked petulantly at being disturbed.

Frances Stuart went to his side; she laid a finger on his arm, and smiled into his eyes, with that mesmeric power which she possessed beyond all women of her day.

"I brought this lady," she said quietly, "to see Your Majesty; indeed I went on purpose to fetch her."

Charles visibly softened: "To you, fairest of maidens," he said, "all things are forgiven;" lifting the hand resting on his arm he raised it to his lips, kissing the long, slim fingers; Miss Stuart still looked at him, her eyes smiling, although her lips were grave.

"I overheard something last night which made my blood boil; I was in two minds whether to come and relate it straight to Your Majesty, or to call upon this lady, with whom I had no previous acquaintance, and bring her to solicit Your Majesty's help; nay," she added, "not help, something which has never been denied to the humblest of your subjects, Your Majesty's justice."

The King's face became grave: "You speak in enigmas, Frances," he said, "pray unravel them."

Thereupon Miss Stuart related verbatim what she had heard, the admissions, nay, the boastings, of His Grace of Buckingham, with regard to the fate of Captain Robert Darcy.

Lucille stood quite still while her champion told her story; her hands were locked together, her bosom rose and fell, she prayed fervently, silently, in the depths of her heart that His Majesty might be brought to see the truth, and espouse the weaker side; as she watched her confidence oozed away, her hopes sank to zero; the King sat sullen, his face averted, a scowl upon his brow—when this was so he was not pleasant to look upon. It appeared as if Miss Stuart had overrated her power and influence with him; nothing of softness, nothing of yielding, showed itself in his countenance as her words drew to a close. Miss Stuart's face reflected her disappointment; she, too, realized that she had failed.

Suddenly Mistress Darcy lived again that scene of many years ago when this man, who now held the power of life and death in his royal grasp, had held her hand in the chapel of the Lees, had given her the ring she had worn ever since, had promised her that if the time should ever come and she was in need or strait, he would repay the debt he owed for her assistance on that occasion.

King Charles turned to the Duke of York: "What

verdict do you pronounce, brother? My Lord Devizes is dead, about that there is no doubt, a pretty man, and a loyal, one of our friends; he perished in a scuffle in which a wench was in question, without doubt through a sword-thrust of this Captain Darcy; the merits of the quarrel are in dispute, but the jury condemned the prisoner. Frances, here, avers a miscarriage of justice, repeating the boastful words of a man in his cups."

"I have heard it said, Sire," Frances put in quietly, "in vino veritas."

The King took no notice, but still addressed the Duke from over his shoulder. "What says our family oracle?"

Dead silence reigned through the room; the two women held their breath, tense, anxious. The dog sleeping on the floor snored heavily, with a stertorous noise.

After what seemed quite a long interval, the Duke replied; his hard face stiff, his eyes averted from Miss Stuart's face:

"The Book decrees, Sire, 'a life for a life.'"

"The Oracle has spoken," His Majesty said, turning to Frances Stuart, as if to register the reply as final.

At that moment Lucille stepped forward. She bent the knee before King Charles, and seized his unwilling hand. The words Miss Stuart had spoken to her in the anteroom surged through her brain:

"Mind, you are fighting for the life of your husband :"
his fate hung in the balance and the scales were
weighted against them.

"Who is this lady?" the King inquired impatiently.

"I am Lucille Darcy!" the kneeling woman cried, fixing Charles with pleading eyes, "the wife of Robert Darcy who lies falsely condemned in the Tower, to die on Thursday."

The King would have released his hand, even perhaps pushed the suppliant away, but she clung to him tenaciously. "More than that, Sire," she cried, "I am the daughter of the late Sir Evelyn and Dame Marjorie Lee, in the County of Warwick."

The announcement arrested His Majesty's attention. His petulance, even anger dropped from him; he looked full into Mistress Darcy's face as if striving to read the truth of what she said in her eyes, to trace some half-forgotten resemblance. King Charles was gifted with an excellent memory, a royal memory for faces; in addition the events, which had marked the threshold of his manhood, were indelibly stamped upon his recollection; his times of adversity, at any rate, had written themselves in large characters on the sensitive plate of his mind.

Again there was silence. Lucille drew from its concealment the ring the King had placed upon her finger; she held it up before him.

"You gave me this, Sire, yourself; you bade me,

if ever I was in need, come to you for assistance ; I am in need now, dire need."

"When was this occasion," the Duke of York asked, "of which this lady speaks?"

But His Majesty did not answer and no one else ventured to break the silence. He sat back in his great chair, his eyes closed almost as if asleep, really memories were stirring in him, his brain busy recalling many half-forgotten items of that far-off year.

At length he sat up, and laid his hand on Mistress Darcy's shoulder: "So you were the child I found in the park so opportunely?"

"Yes, Sire."

"I owed my liberty, perhaps my life to your father. What said my brother just now?"

"A life for a life," Mistress Darcy answered quickly.

"Then his verdict shall stand, in other sense than perhaps he intended." He smiled, looking at Lucille critically. "You must give me the ring," he said, "it has served its purpose ; I cannot let you plead it again."

Madam Darcy did as she was bid, laying the hoop in the King's hand.

In the meantime, Miss Stuart, quick to act, brought His Majesty a writing-desk: "Your signature, Sire," she said; "the King's mercy and the King's justice."

"Justice is a woman, and blind."

"Not always, Sire ; sometimes a man with a keen eyesight——"

"You flatter, Frances !"

His Majesty wrote a line, signed it, and handed the paper to Mistress Darcy.

"Be quick," he said, "hurry to the Governor of the Tower and he will restore your husband to your keeping ;" then to Miss Stuart he added : "it were better George Villiers should hear of it afterwards, rather than before."

"I will see to that, Sire," Miss Stuart assured him, with a smile.

Immediately afterwards with deep curtses the two ladies left the apartment.

The King held the ring, restored to him after so many years, in the palm of his hand.

"It is a small thing," he said, "to be the price of a man's life ;" then he added, after a pause, with one of his whimsical smiles : "George will be furious when he hears of this, but perhaps I shall sleep the more soundly to-night for having done it."

Miss Stuart guided her companion rapidly, through the intricacies of the Palace, to the way by which they had entered.

Mistress Darcy walked like one in a dream, hardly realizing the great good fortune which had come to her. When they reached a grass knoll above the river, Miss Stuart stopped and kissed her.

"Take my barge," she said, "go to the Tower and release your husband."

"I can never thank you enough, madam, for all you have done for me," Lucille said; "you have given me back my husband, who is to me everything."

"Nay," Miss Stuart replied gently, "it was not I but yourself; I failed as never have I before with His Majesty; I read it in his face, knowing not what a weapon you had in your armoury; your appeal stirred him just where he is most to be touched, in the memory of those days when his father's fate seemed impending over him."

"It was you, madam, who brought me to him, else had I never gone," Lucille insisted, "it is you who circumvented the enemies of my husband. I shall ever pray for you, pray you may find the same happiness to which I am going."

Frances Stuart slightly blushed: "Perhaps——" she said—then she turned, and called some instructions to her head servant in the barge, bidding him be at Mistress Darcy's disposal and return later to Hampton.

Lucille kissed her hand when they parted.

"I will watch over the King," she said, "and see no fresh order is obtained from him until you have your husband safe away; His Grace of Buckingham shall not have access to him for a while, I promise you."

So saying, she ran up the terraced walk back to the Palace.

Mistress Darcy was assisted into the barge, and directly afterwards the boat was turned in the direction of London. On their way they passed her house at Kingston; it was growing towards dusk, Dr. Fletcher stood at the bottom of the lawn awaiting Mistress Darcy's return; he had been out when she left, but received a message which she had written down for him. He held the child Harold by the hand.

The rowers pulled to the bank, Lucille held the precious paper up to the Chaplain and cried: "God has been good to us; I have from the King that which I petitioned."

He knelt down and with bared head, his white locks stirred by the cold wind, offered fervent thanksgiving, while Harold stood by, greatly wondering.

CHAPTER XI

FREEDOM

"HAVE all ready for my lord?" Mistress Darcy asked Dr. Fletcher; then she caught Harold up in her arms. "Your father is waiting for us, will you come with me?" She buried her face in the child's neck to hide her glad tears, but he felt them nevertheless, and flung his little arms about her.

"Aye, mother; it is so long since he was home; I do so want to see father again."

Mistress Darcy could not speak; she lifted the child up and carried him over the side of the barge. It came to her, with an overwhelming rush of feeling, how very nigh the children had been to never seeing their father again.

It was Harold's bedtime, his eyes closed, and he slept while the night approached, and the barge swept on its way; not one of the rowers but felt a great sympathy for the beautiful young woman, and the boy with fair curls nestling against her breast; much more would they have sympathized had they understood the purport of the errand.

It was pitch dark when they reached the stairs leading to the 'Traitors' Gate at the 'Tower. Lights were twinkling along the river, where other barges and larger ships were moored; the tide was high, and the water splashed against the stone bulwarks of the frowning building.

The watchman, summoned from his lodge, would have had them return again in the morning; he declared that Sir Ralph Abercromby had gone to his supper, and must on no account be disturbed. But Mistress Darcy had gone through too much, and gained her ends too hardly, to be turned back even by the severe face of the janitor of the Lower Gate.

"I am from the King," she cried, "and His Majesty's errand brooks no delay."

Then the man admitted them. Harold was wide-awake by this time, clinging to his mother's hand, frightened at his surroundings, barely able to see in the dim light.

They waited in the lodge until Sir Ralph came to them, surprised and, at first, somewhat angry at the untimely visit. When he saw who it was, and Mistress Darcy told her news, showing the document, he smote his hands together with satisfaction; albeit he was a stately gentleman, and somewhat distant of manner, as became his office.

"Never shall I give up a prisoner more willingly, madam, than I shall your husband, for his is too fine a head, and his heart too true, for the fate to which

he was destined by the malice of his enemies, and the miscarriage of the King's justice."

At this speech little Harold began to cry, gathering something from the tone, rather than the words, of the purport of Sir Ralph's remark. When he saw the Lieutenant of the Tower hold up the heavy bunch of keys he carried in his hand, the child clung to his mother more closely ; she bent over him and said :

"It is all well, Harold, darling, else I had not brought you ; we are to take your father back with us, by the King's command."

So they went on, following Sir Ralph. Lucille's heart grew hot, then cold, then hot again, when they passed along the dimly-lit passage and up the stone stairs, stopping opposite the iron-barred door, while Sir Ralph Abercromby selected a key from the bunch. Never had Robert's dreadful fate appeared so near, so real, as when she stood listening to the click of the lock, and shooting back of the iron bolt of the cell-door.

The Lieutenant threw the massive gate open, and motioning for them to enter, drew it back again after them, himself standing without.

Robert was sitting on a low wooden stool, with his back to the entrance, reading by the dim light of an oil-lamp in the very Latin version of the Psalms, from which he had transcribed a passage when he wrote to Lucille.

His shoulders were bowed, and, in his drooping head, Lucille seemed to read all the despair and resignation, which were fighting within for the mastery.

He did not look up, doubtless thinking a warder had come with his supper.

Lucille went and knelt by his side, embracing him with her soft arms, from which the lace of her gown had fallen back, her cloak slipping from her shoulders; Harold crept to his father's knee, as he was ever wont to do.

Robert Darcy held his wife in his arms and kissed her on hair, and eyes, and lips, and throat; then he held her at arms'-length, and said.

"Why this dress, sweetheart, it is more fit for the Court than for this poor place, where your husband must needs be?"

He tried to smile—and failed, great tears welling up in his eyes instead.

"It *has* been to the Court," she cried, "and the King has sent me to bring you away. Oh! Robert, you are free! free! Free to come home with us again."

The moments which passed after this are almost beyond description; the revulsion of feeling, the lifting of the great load, the infinite joy of that reunion within those walls, which had so often witnessed the tragedy of despair.

The three passed out. Sir Ralph Abercromby

shook Captain Darcy warmly by the hand ; the two men parted with mutual respect and gratification on both sides.

Robert breathed more freely when the night wind from the river played upon his face, as he sat in the barge, holding Harold cuddled against his shoulder, his wife close to his side ; prayer was on his lips and in his heart, a fervent thanksgiving for that Providence which had brought him out of the darkness of the "Valley" into the light once more.

They stayed but one night at their Kingston house. It reminded them too vividly of all they had gone through. The next day, escorted by armed servants riding before and behind the coach, the whole party started for Grangeland Abbey. Anne Pembury was restored to her father, now returned to his place of business.

The Duke of Buckingham never crossed Captain Darcy's path again ; there came a time when, broken in health and fortune, a ruined and hopeless man, he crept to one of his own farmsteads, and there lay down to die. One morning he was visited by a man with white hair, shaggy white eyebrows, his back bent, but stern as ever ; Ebenezer Holden, in his eighty-eighth year, still remembered the wrong that had been done him all that time back. He stood and looked at the Duke as the latter tossed upon his bed.

"The end has come for you," he said, "as I foretold it would ; may God forgive you, as I do."

The Duke looked at him, reading, even in those hours, the real nature of the man, the hardness of the Puritan heart.

"I hope," he said, "that God will forgive me better than you do, Master Holden."

At the Abbey, Robert Darcy and Lucille, with their children, and Dr. Fletcher and neighbours kept such a happy Yule, after that wonderful deliverance, as never had they enjoyed the like before.

On Christmas morning Robert embraced his wife, and as he did so was reminded of the absence of that thin gold chain, which had so long been about her throat.

"I must get you another ring, sweetheart," he said, "to take the place of the King's signet."

"Nay," she answered, "I will not have one, for every time I feel it missing I thank God that He gave you back to me."

So, well pleased with her answer, Robert kissed her afresh.

THE END

